

IN A GARDEN



IN A GARDEN

PLAYS BY PHILIP BARRY

THE YOUNGEST

YOU AND I

IN A GARDEN

WHITE WINGS

JOHN

PARIS BOUND

HOLIDAY

132

IN A GARDEN

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY
PHILIP BARRY



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3503
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1929

SAMUEL FRENCH

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TO ARTHUR HOPKINS

"IN A GARDEN" was first produced by Arthur Hopkins at the Plymouth Theatre, New York City, on November 16, 1925. It was directed by Arthur Hopkins and the settings were designed by Robert Edmond Jones.

CHARACTERS

ADRIAN TERRY

LISSA TERRY

ROGER COMPTON

NORRIE BLISS

MISS MABIE

FREDERIC

ACTION AND SCENE

The action of the play takes place in New York City in the Spring of the present year.

The three acts take place in the same setting: the library of Adrian Terry's house.

ACT ONE

ACT ONE

The Library is on the second floor of ADRIAN TERRY'S house in Sutton Place, New York.

It is a handsome room, in proportion, in decoration, in furnishings. The main entrance is from the hall, at back. Down Right there is a door, leading into ADRIAN'S study. At Left, an arch leads into the dining-room. Down Right double windows open upon a small balcony admitting sunlight in a volume, over the blue walls and ceiling. Through these windows a portion of a tree is visible against the sky, the house being situated in a section of New York where gardens still exist. Amongst the other furniture in the room, is a writing-table.

It is the last of day of April, this year. About five-thirty in the afternoon.

MISS MABIE is seated at the desk, clipping press-notices from a pile of newspapers, and marking them. She is about thirty-eight, slight and plain. She wears nose-glasses, and is rather severely dressed.

ROGER COMPTON enters from the hall. He is a gusty little man of fifty, partially bald. He appears at the moment to be upset about something.

COMPTON

Where is he?

MISS MABIE

Mr. Terry?

COMPTON

Yes. Of course.—When's he coming in?

MISS MABIE

Directly the matinee was over, he said.

[*She glances at her watch.*]

COMPTON

Humph! A wonder he'd go to it.

MISS MABIE

Wouldn't you want to see your first few performances?

COMPTON

You know what I mean. (*A silence.*) I got that note, Miss Mabie.

MISS MABIE

I imagined that was what brought you.

COMPTON

Any other man, and I'd say he was talking for effect.

MISS MABIE

Not Mr. Terry. He means it, well enough.

COMPTON

And if there are bridges to be burned, he'll burn the last stick in 'em, eh? Well, I won't stand for it!

MISS MABIE

I presume it's his privilege to stop writing when he likes.

COMPTON

Privilege, my eye! He's made himself public property

now. He's got no more privileges than I have.—Miss Mabie, I'm fond of Terry.

MISS MABIE

I know that, Mr. Compton.

COMPTON

I got him his first production. When I was a best-seller he was my ewe lamb.—What are you laughing at?

MISS MABIE

I'm not laughing.

COMPTON (*shouting*)

My ewe lamb he was and my ewe lamb he is!—I don't care if he's *seven* feet tall! And now—just as he's doing the work *I* hoped to do, and couldn't—he quits. (*He turns on her sharply.*) You don't want him to, do you?

MISS MABIE

I do want him to be happy.

[COMPTON *seats himself, disgustedly.*

COMPTON

Home and fireside, eh? Joy and rapture. Man and wife.

MISS MABIE

I think if you had lived with those two for seven years, as I have, you'd——

COMPTON

I'd nothing of the sort!

MISS MABIE

It's such complete happiness.

COMPTON

Just let me tell you something that's true of any artist worthy of the name: when he's completely happy, he doesn't work—and when he isn't working, he isn't happy—and when he isn't one or the other, he *dies*.

[MISS MABIE *laughs nervously*.

MISS MABIE

That's very bright, I'm sure.

[COMPTON *leans back in his chair, proud of himself*.

COMPTON

I know Adrian better than anyone in this world does—including his wife. By “dies” I mean dies spiritually. How'd you like that to happen?

MISS MABIE

Oh, I shouldn't.

[COMPTON *leans forward again, confidently*.

COMPTON

Are you ready to go to any lengths to save him? *I* am!

MISS MABIE

I don't see anything to be done.

COMPTON

You realize what his main gift is, don't you—apart from his so-called “taste,” and all that?

MISS MABIE

Why—his knowledge of people, I suppose.

COMPTON

He knows no more about people than I do. That's his pet delusion. Listen: Terry's god is perfection—the god of the mountains—and Terry's gift is the gift of making mountains out of molehills. Well—this guest they're expecting—Norrie Bliss—has he come yet?

MISS MABIE

His train isn't due until five-something—why?

COMPTON (*with relish*)

I'm just a hack novelist, Miss Mabie—but I believe I can hack a molehill out of Bliss—if I'm driven to it.

[MISS MABIE *rises*.

MISS MABIE

I don't know quite what you're getting at, but——

COMPTON

Oh, don't worry! It's not dangerous—(*He chuckles.*)—that is, not unless Terry makes it so.

[ADRIAN TERRY *enters from the hall. He is forty, tall and of youthful figure, with a face uncommonly fine and sensitive, for the strength of the features.*

ADRIAN

Hello, Roger! (MISS MABIE *goes out, into the study.*

ADRIAN *goes to* COMPTON *and offers him his hand.*

COMPTON *turns from him stiffly, without taking it.*

ADRIAN *laughs.*) I do love to see you with your blood up. Go on now—ruffle your neck feathers.
[COMPTON *glowers at him.*

COMPTON

Look here, Adrian—how long is it you've been writing?

ADRIAN

Fifteen—sixteen years.

[COMPTON *whistles at the ceiling.*

COMPTON

Good Lord, the cheek of the man!

ADRIAN

Why "cheek" particularly?

COMPTON

You think you *can* stop? Stop for good? Just by saying so?

ADRIAN

I know it. I have.

COMPTON

You're a dramatist to the soles of your shoes.

ADRIAN

Then let's say I've just put on my slippers—my dancing slippers.

[*He does a brief dance step.*

COMPTON

Don't *do* that! (*Then more calmly.*) There's no one to replace you, Adrian.

ADRIAN

Keep on, and I'll begin to feel really important.

COMPTON

Damn it! Do you realize the strides you've been making here lately? Do you realize that you may have it in you to turn out stuff that will *live*?

ADRIAN (*wearily*)

Oh, Lord! (*Then.*) That's sweet of you, dear Roger—but as I told you in my note, I prefer to live myself. I'm forty, you know.

[*He seats himself.*]

COMPTON

What's forty to a writer?

ADRIAN

Exactly what it is to a plumber: half of eighty. I find I'm in love with life, Roger—so much so that the mere reflection of it no longer satisfies me. I want the original—undiluted—all I have left of it—all I can get of it.

COMPTON

So "Back to Nature," I suppose.

ADRIAN

Yes—in a way.

COMPTON

My God, of all places to go.

ADRIAN

Won't you join me? Natural Man A. Natural Man B.

COMPTON (*shouting*)

There isn't a natural man in existence!—Not out of prison, or an asylum.

ADRIAN

Come to see me on visiting-days.

COMPTON

Different from the rest of the world, aren't you?
—Something very special.

ADRIAN

In one particular, yes. One important particular.

COMPTON

What?

ADRIAN

My wife.

COMPTON

What's your wife got to do with it?

ADRIAN

What *hasn't* she! (*A pause, then he continues, with some diffidence.*) You see, Lissa and I aren't like the usual pair. There's never been anyone else for either of us.

COMPTON (*without a smile*)

Ha-ha.

ADRIAN

For either of us! And do you know what that means? It means perfection, Roger—in just about the faultiest of all human relationships. Rather a good

starting point to the—er—larger life, don't you think?

COMPTON

You make me sick.

ADRIAN

Let's hope Lissa isn't affected in the same way. I'm to tell her today. (*Reflectively.*) But do you know, I think Lissa is the one person who'll entirely understand what I'm driving at.

COMPTON

Sweet matrimony.—*I* seem to have missed something.

ADRIAN

Indeed you have!

COMPTON

Just as I thought. You're too blasted, rotten happy.

ADRIAN

I am happy!

COMPTON

Well, it's your finish, understand?

[ADRIAN *gaily kisses his hand to the air.* COMPTON'S *voice rises.*

COMPTON

The end! At forty!—Of money, health, success, and a happy marriage. (*Shouting.*) Above all, of a happy marriage!

ADRIAN

Tsch-tsch—very grave.

COMPTON

Yes, by George! If there's one person in this world who needs a good, stiff dose of misery, it's you, you damned bluebird.

ADRIAN

I enjoy your ranting, Roger, but I'm afraid it's no use.

COMPTON

If I had one good fresh idea for a play to draw under your nose——

ADRIAN

I shouldn't even sniff.

COMPTON

Or a wrench of some sort to throw into these joyful works of yours——

ADRIAN

They'd withstand it. Really, I'm afraid it's no use.
[*A pause.*]

COMPTON

All right. You won't hear another peep from me.

ADRIAN

Thanks.—Then you're fit to dine with us tomorrow. Can you? The Forellis are coming.

COMPTON

Sorry. I've got an engagement.

ADRIAN

Can't you get out of it?

[LISSA TERRY *enters from the hall.* ADRIAN and COMPTON *rise.*

COMPTON

Not possibly.

[LISSA *has just come in from the street, with a box of flowers under her arm. She wears a smartly-made dress of some soft material, a hat and a light fur neckpiece. She carries her gloves and a handbag. LISSA is twenty-eight, a shade above medium height, slim and youthful. In every line of her one sees breeding and distinction—which serve, in a measure, to temper the beauty of her face.*

ADRIAN

Hello *Lissa!*

LISSA

Hello *Adrian!* And, as I live, little Roger!—How are you?

COMPTON

Splendid, thanks. I needn't ask about you.

LISSA

It's glorious out.

ADRIAN

How was the concert?

LISSA

I didn't go. I just stayed in the Park. It was four before I knew it. (*She sniffs the air.*) Heavens, how

stuff. Two writers must have been talking shop here. The air's full of smoke and phrases. (*She goes to the windows and opens them wide.*) No sign of Norrie yet?

ADRIAN

William telephoned he'd missed him at the station.

LISSA

A taxi won't hurt him. (*She opens the flower-box and holds it under ADRIAN'S nose.*) I got these for his room. Aren't they nice?

ADRIAN

Aren't they! (*She turns to go.*) Oh, Lissa——

LISSA

Yes?

ADRIAN

Come back after I get rid of this pest, will you? I've some news for you.

LISSA

What about?

ADRIAN

Me.

LISSA

Tell me now!

ADRIAN

It's too long a story.

LISSA

As soon as I get my hat off, then.

[*She goes out. COMPTON affects a casual air.*]

COMPTON

Bliss hasn't arrived yet, eh?

ADRIAN

He's due today, from the coast.

COMPTON

I used to know Norris Bliss. Why's he leaving China?
Is he giving up the diplomatic service?

ADRIAN

I don't think so. He's just changing posts, I presume.

COMPTON

Is he a good friend of yours?

ADRIAN

I know him very slightly. Why?

COMPTON

I know him very well. (*A pause. He blows a gust of cigarette smoke at the ceiling.*)—Though I've met him only once.

ADRIAN

He bared his soul in one interview, did he?

COMPTON

Without knowing it, he did.—I don't think much of Bliss, Adrian. (*He rises. MISS MABIE comes in from the study, seats herself at the desk and continues to clip and arrange press-notices.*) I've got some telephoning to do. Do you mind if I do it here?

ADRIAN

Wait a minute. What's the matter with Bliss?

COMPTON

Oh, nothing, nothing at all!

ADRIAN

Come on!

COMPTON

Maybe I'm stressing a single impression too much, but—well, isn't it you who say "Given one good characterizing incident about a man, and you have the man?"

ADRIAN

It sounds like me.

COMPTON

Well, *he* gave me one, right enough.

ADRIAN

What was it?

COMPTON

I don't like to say anything that——

ADRIAN

Come on! I won't publish it.

[*A brief pause.*]

COMPTON

He was at Gregory Kendall's place in Katonah, one day several years ago. I motored over from Croton to take tea with Greg. Have you ever been there?

ADRIAN

No. I think not.

COMPTON

He's got a little walled garden tucked away in a corner of the orchard. (*He glances at the room about him.*) It's no bigger than this room. Marvellous little affair. His daughter had some young girls with her—all in their early twenties somewhere—well-mannered, full of inhibitions—quite unlike the present breed.

ADRIAN

I was going to say.

COMPTON

Still, for all their reserve, they seemed to me to be—rather combustible. When they'd left, I got talking about 'em to Kendall and Bliss. (*He glances sideways at MISS MABIE.*) I contended that if the primmest of the lot were left alone in that garden with a man, a moon, and perhaps a little distant music—

ADRIAN

—The combustion would take place.

COMPTON

The combustion would take place. And whereas it wouldn't matter so much to the girl at the time, it might get to matter a lot later on, when she found herself married to someone else.

ADRIAN

Why so?

COMPTON

Well, as I said to Bliss, "Every wife is at heart an-

other man's mistress"—the man who just happened to be on hand when first romance came to flower in her.

ADRIAN

That's an amusing observation.

COMPTON

And a true one.

ADRIAN

No. Not quite.

COMPTON

Well, I won't argue with you whether it's "every wife" or "most wives." The point is, how Bliss took it. He got up, stretched himself, and announced that he'd bear that in mind at the dance there that night—some fancy-dress thing. Inasmuch as next day he was off to hell-and-gone some place for a number of years, it might be a comforting thought to know he'd left a potential mistress behind him. "For future reference," he said.

ADRIAN

Literally?

COMPTON

Exact words. Kendall laughed, and told him the garden would be open. *I* thought it was the remark of a young bounder.

ADRIAN (*amused*)

You think it places him, eh?

COMPTON

If he went through with it, he offered some perfect

child one of my literary concepts as a genuine, original emotion of his own.

ADRIAN (*gravely*)

In fact, stole your stuff. (*With a gesture.*) Bounder, liar, thief.

COMPTON

Don't you think that's enough?

ADRIAN

Well—I'd call it a fairly complete characterization.

COMPTON

And I believe he did go through with it. He'd been looking at one of those girls as if he'd like to eat her up. I heard the next day from someone who'd been at the dance, that the two of 'em disappeared together during the evening and were gone for more than an hour. It worried me. The girl worried me.

ADRIAN

It probably spun itself out for her, like any other young affair.

COMPTON

It hadn't the chance. He was off the next day to China. He left it cut off short intentionally—in cold blood—"for future reference."

ADRIAN

Oh, I see—a romance without an outcome. (*A thoughtful pause.*) Memories like that do grow in. The heart never tires of imagined possibilities, does it?—It tires only of possibilities realized.—Rather fascinating, you know—rather fascinating—

COMPTON

You see what that one little episode might become.

ADRIAN

Yes—and you'd better grab it, Roger. You haven't had a decent idea in years. Throw the whole story to the husband—he's your man. If he——

COMPTON (*lowly, to MISS MABIE*)

Take this down, will you?

[MISS MABIE *puts the scrap-book aside and prepares to take down* ADRIAN's *observations.*

ADRIAN

—Of course he's *bound* to find out that this—flaw exists in an otherwise perfect relationship between him and his wife. And naturally he'll have to do something about it.

COMPTON

Oh?—What, for instance?

ADRIAN

That depends entirely upon the kind of person you make him.

COMPTON

Well—say he's a man of taste—subtlety—ingenuity—ingenious as hell.

ADRIAN

“Taste”—then no stormy scenes—no fireworks. “Subtlety”—then he'd see the necessity of at once giving that thwarted romance the outcome it lacks. “Ingenuity”—“ingenuity”—(*Then suddenly, excitedly.*)—Then, in order to do it, he'd contrive some-

how to put those two back into their original setting—not the identical garden, of course—that would make them both suspicious and self-conscious—but one to suggest it—strongly—(*He rises, with a triumphant gesture.*)—There you are!

COMPTON

No I'm not. I'm still here.

ADRIAN

The roots of that memory lie deep in a certain garden—(*He begins to walk about.*)—Your husband's problem is how to kill the memory—painlessly, and with taste. (*A pause.*) His solution is to turn back the clock—cause history to live itself over again, but this time with an outcome—an actual outcome which must inevitably dislodge, supplant that whole glamorous host of imagined outcomes with which his wife's fancy has endowed it. Fancy gives way to fact every time——

COMPTON (*with another glance to MISS MABIE*)

Um—so it does.

ADRIAN

And incidentally, your husband is aware that romantic incidents don't bear repeating—that if repeated, the memory dies.

COMPTON

Clever fellow, isn't he?

ADRIAN

I took him at your valuation. Where's the particular brilliance required to foresee how known people will act in a known situation?

COMPTON

You honestly believe you can do that?

ADRIAN

Of course. Every move they'll make. Well—he knows his wife—naturally. And he knows the other man as—among other things—a liar. All right: back with the two of them into their setting. Leave them alone there. The setting stimulates the liar's instinct to repeat a successful lie. Whether or not the woman sees through a deception the girl failed to, that roving ghost of a memory will be laid, a sick love will have been made whole. (*A moment—then with feeling.*) It's high comedy, Roger. That's no novel. *That* lives! (COMPTON *can no longer restrain his laughter.*) Oh, go to hell.

COMPTON

What did I tell you?—Mad, crazy in love with a new idea—just as you've given up writing forever.

ADRIAN

It's not my idea, you fool.

COMPTON

I give it to you. Take it.

ADRIAN

Thanks. I don't want it.

COMPTON

Don't want it! You're lusting for it. (*He rises and extends his hands, in a broad gesture.*) There—I make you a present. Better let this be a lesson, young

fellow—your nose for a situation doesn't grow shorter in a day, you know.

ADRIAN

Get out! I'm tired of you.

COMPTON

And you can't whip off your dramatic instinct like a coat, either. (*He chuckles to himself.*) Oh, I have hopes of you now!

ADRIAN

You needn't have.

COMPTON

We'll see! We'll see.—Where's that telephone?

ADRIAN

In the study. And look over my note-books. The third shelf. I will them to you.

COMPTON (*going toward the study*)

Thanks—I wouldn't deprive you. Tomorrow you'd be wishing 'em back.

[*He goes out into the study.* ADRIAN *lights a cigarette and turns to* MISS MABIE. *They look at each other for a moment without speaking. Then:*

ADRIAN

Miss Mabie, there's one thing I shan't be able to stand—and that's that constant look of condemnation—reproach—whatever it is.

MISS MABIE

I'm sorry. I wasn't aware that I——

ADRIAN

I am an exceedingly happy man these days, and I won't have my spirits dampened by people reading me lectures—or *looking* me lectures.

[She makes a helpless gesture with her pad and pencil.]

MISS MABIE (*faltering*)

I—I thought——

ADRIAN

No—nor outwitting me into doing something I don't want to do, either.

MISS MABIE

I understand. But I—I thought if it was really a good idea, I thought it was a pity not to—perhaps to—(*She smiles uncertainly.*)—make a gift of it to some one of your writing friends, who—(*She rises from the desk.*)—But I see that you——

ADRIAN

Just a moment—(*She reseats herself.*)—You've got the central idea outlined already, haven't you?

MISS MABIE

I—don't know.

[She prepares to take his dictation.]

ADRIAN

There are three sides to it. First—first—now wait a minute——(*He thinks, deeply.* LISSA enters from the hall, unnoticed by either of them. She watches them quietly for a moment. Then ADRIAN continues to

MISS MABIE.) Yes!—"Every wife, in her heart, is another man's mistress."

LISSA

What's all this I hear?

ADRIAN

A brilliant idea: "Every wife, in her heart, is another man's mistress."

[LISSA *laughs*.

LISSA

More than brilliant. But how so?

[MISS MABIE *examines her notes*.

MISS MABIE (*quoting*)

"The man who happened to be on hand when first romance came to flower in her."

LISSA

Dear, dear.—Who's going to write the music?

ADRIAN

But seriously, what do you think of it?

LISSA

Just what I think of most glib sayings that begin "Every woman"—"Any man." Amusing, perhaps—but true? (*She laughs and shrugs*.) Oh, no.

ADRIAN

They don't impress you, eh?

LISSA

Why should they?—"Send a telegram to 'any man' of forty, saying 'Flee. All is discovered.' Ten to one he'll flee."—Only he won't. " 'Most men' lead lives

of quiet desperation." Only they don't. " 'Every wife' is at heart another man's mistress." Only she isn't. Plays are plays, my dear—and life's life. Don't try to mix them. They won't. People are too unexpected.
[*She goes toward the hall door.*]

ADRIAN

Don't go.

LISSA

I don't want to disturb you.

ADRIAN

But you're not! That's all for today, Miss Mabie.

MISS MABIE

I—I'll type what we've got so far.
[*She goes out into the study.*]

LISSA

Then you *were* at something.

ADRIAN

No. That is—(*He hesitates a moment. Then, with emphasis:*)—No. I was not. (*He goes to her.*) Are you prepared for a pretty startling piece of news?

LISSA

Save it a moment—(*She puts her arms about him, and her head upon his breast.*)—Let me stay just here for awhile. (*After a moment she lifts her head, smiling.*) Now——

ADRIAN

What is it, Lissa?

LISSA

The old trouble: feeling over-civilized, as you call it.

ADRIAN

Poor darling.—What would you like to do?

LISSA

If you're just beginning a new play, I suppose there's no chance of our getting away for awhile.

ADRIAN

But of course there is!

LISSA

No, never mind. I'm all right.

ADRIAN

I'm not beginning a new one.

LISSA

Really?

ADRIAN

Really.

LISSA

Then——

ADRIAN

Anything.

LISSA

South Carolina. Some place in the woods, there. Spring doesn't come fast enough for me. I want to go meet it.

ADRIAN

Then meet it, you shall.

LISSA

Oh, I should love it! Thanks—thanks . . . (*She clings to him for an instant, and then leaves him.*)

ADRIAN

Dear—you haven't been really unhappy?

LISSA

Have I seemed it?

ADRIAN

No.—But now——

LISSA

It's just that I came around through the garden. It isn't fixed yet, but you can feel something under your feet—moving—straining—pushing. (*Breathlessly.*) Lovely! (*She laughs, lightly.*)—Spring fever. Years ago, at school, the nuns gave us brimstone for it. So you may give me hell, if you like.

ADRIAN

I don't like.

LISSA

Oh, *bless* the boy! I feel better already.

ADRIAN

I feel like a very small truck-horse just turned into pasture. (*He does a dignified gambol. LISSA looks on, amusedly. He wheels about suddenly, takes her shoulders in his hands, and demands:*) Ask me "Whence the great joy," why don't you?

LISSA

My sprightly one—whence the great joy?

ADRIAN

I've retired!

[LISSA's expression of amusement at once leaves her face. She exclaims:

LISSA

Adrian!

ADRIAN

For good and all!—I've written my last play! My last anything! No more! Not another line! [*He flings himself into a large chair, and sits there, smiling contentedly up at her. She takes his head between her hands and gazes searchingly into his eyes.* I mean just that.

LISSA

Adrian—*why* . . . ?

ADRIAN

To do something I've never had time for—*live*, my dear!

[*She shakes his head back and forth between her hands.*

LISSA

How did you come to it?

ADRIAN

Direct—by the strongest conviction a man ever had. (*Suddenly her knees give way. She sinks down upon one corner of the chair and buries her head in his breast.*) Why, Lissa——

LISSA

Oh—I can't tell you! You don't know how I've wished for it—how I've longed!

ADRIAN

Why, darling—I'd no idea——

LISSA

Adrian, it's been so awful. I've—prayed with my whole heart to believe as you did—books, plays, pictures—more than life itself—greater, finer, you'd say. But I couldn't. It's not in me to. Then—I got feeling I must have a blind spot somewhere, because *you* were so sure of it. Then I—lately—you know, I've been braving it out. . . .

ADRIAN

You've been right. It's I who've been——

LISSA

No. Things just—struck you differently. Ah, but *now* they don't—they don't, do they, Adrian?

ADRIAN

Still a little uncertain, are you?

LISSA

I've seen you so long—watching people—drawing them out—finding “situations” where there weren't any situations at all—*using* everything, everybody—cutting them up and putting the pieces together again. You went to such lengths with it. . . .

ADRIAN

Don't, Lissa——

LISSA

Things I loved most—I've seen that awful look of appraisal come in your eyes. Things people said—I've watched you repeating them over in your

mind, so you wouldn't lose them, before you got them down. "What's he do it for?" I'd say—"What's it all about? Isn't he content to let things be? What's he *do it for?*"

ADRIAN

Wait, Lissa——

LISSA

I've even seen myself, dressed up in another person—walking across the stage in your plays—though I don't think you suspected for a moment, who it was. I've seen that sharp, intent look come—even when you were with me—alone.

ADRIAN

Oh, no—no, that couldn't be.

LISSA

It *has* been. (*A pause.*) Dear, dear Adrian—it's all past?

ADRIAN

Completely—absolutely.
[*A pause.*]

LISSA

A fine wife I've been! A real help!

ADRIAN

Lissa, do you want me to go to my room and shoot myself? (*She shakes her head, and contrives to smile.*) Well, then——

LISSA

But it's just been because I felt so strongly the other

way. Life's such a precious thing. I'd rather you worked with your hands. I'd rather you did anything, than keep worrying it, that way—trying to hitch it to something—when everything else should hitch to it.

ADRIAN

I know. I know, dear.

LISSA

You see, I'm a little crazy: I don't care anything at all for what they call "accomplishment."—I think I'd love you—adore you—if you drove a canal barge——

ADRIAN

Let's!

LISSA

Or just sat the whole day in a meadow, counting your fingers. (*He laughs. She laughs with him.*)
A fairly pleasant thing, marriage.

ADRIAN

Not for everyone! But has it occurred to you *why* ours is perfect—really perfect?

LISSA

There isn't any reason. Don't go looking for reasons, now.

ADRIAN

I needn't look! I've got it!—Because, my dear, by a heavenly piece of luck, there's never been anyone else for either of us. There's not one corner of our hearts, where we aren't. Perfection like this—it

makes everything else rattle like—like an empty——
[*He gropes for the right word, frowning.*]

LISSA

Never mind the word. Words aren't of any account any more. Oh, what a lark we're off on! Adrian—*promise* me you won't make phrases about the trees. . . .

ADRIAN

I'll be too occupied carving our initials on them.

LISSA

If you would—and mean it!

ADRIAN

Darling, I shall blush furiously when I hold your hand. (LISSA *extends it to him.*) No—I'm too shy.
[*They laugh. Then suddenly LISSA becomes very grave.*]

LISSA

Listen, you Adrian Terry: I don't mind your plays—plays are all right. I shouldn't a bit mind your writing them—I'd even like it——
[*She hesitates.*]

ADRIAN

If——?

LISSA

If they wouldn't creep into our real life and—and infect it!

ADRIAN

“Infect”—what a ghastly word. .

LISSA

And what a ghastly thing! (*Then, in a rush:*) Oh, make *them* hitch, too! Let life come first! Life—and then—then all the plays you like. Just so long as you keep the two in their right order!

ADRIAN (*smiling*)

I think, for a while, we'd better concentrate on the one.

LISSA

I think so! I think we had! (*She leans up and kisses him impulsively.*) There!—Now I *must* see that Norrie's room's ready. I shan't be a minute.

[*She goes out into the hall. After a moment FREDERIC enters from the dining-room, sees that ADRIAN is alone and turns to go out again.*

ADRIAN

What is it, Frederic?

FREDERIC

I was looking for Mrs. Terry, sir.—Mrs. Forelli telephoned to say that they regretted very much they would not be able to dine here tomorrow, as expected.

ADRIAN

The Forellis can't come?

FREDERIC

No, sir. Their youngest child is ill.

[COMPTON *enters from the study and picks up his hat and stick.*

ADRIAN

Oh, too bad.—I'll tell Mrs. Terry.

FREDERIC

If you will, sir.

[*He goes out into the dining-room. COMPTON takes a book from a small table and reads the title:*

COMPTON

"Bramblebush Grapes," by Roger Compton. (*He flings the book into a corner.*) Trash! (*ADRIAN laughs. COMPTON turns on him.*) All my stuff's trash. But I go on!—And then a man like you—oh, you fool, you!

ADRIAN

A happy fool.

COMPTON

Damn your happiness! (*ADRIAN laughs. COMPTON's face sets.*) I've a good mind to——

ADRIAN

You've a good mind to write books with. I've a better one, to live with.

COMPTON

Completely domesticated, eh?—Go curl up on your hearth-rug—tabby-cat!

[*He stalks to the hall-doorway.*

ADRIAN

'Mind your blood-pressure, Roger. These fits of

spleen affect your work.—Learn from me: happiness—contentment.

[COMPTON *wheels about and confronts him.*

COMPTON

Perhaps you'll be interested to know that the girl Bliss took into Kendall's garden that night was one Lissa Carr—later to become the wife of one Adrian Terry, professional bluebird! Now! Get happy over that!

[*In an instant he is gone. ADRIAN stands looking after him without moving. Then he laughs, but unconvincingly. LISSA enters from the hall.*

LISSA

Who was that, going downstairs?

ADRIAN

Roger Compton.

LISSA

Oh—I thought for a moment it might be Norrie.—Imagine thinking Roger was Norrie!

[*A pause.*

ADRIAN

How about leaving for the South on Monday, Lissa?

LISSA

Sunday!—But we don't know how long Norrie's staying. Adrian—what on earth made you ask him?

ADRIAN

I thought you'd want me to. He's your friend, not mine.

LISSA

I hate meeting people again, after so long. Not meeting them so much, as having to be under the same roof with them.—What's the matter?

ADRIAN

Nothing. Why?

LISSA

I thought there might be some soot on my nose.

ADRIAN

What's he like, anyway?

LISSA

Norrie?—I don't know, now. Rather a sweet boy, then. Thin, with red cheeks. Young. Fresh as a daisy. Fearfully—natural. I think he was the most natural person I've ever known.

ADRIAN

Are you afraid he'll have changed?

LISSA

Well—yes. Yes, I am.

ADRIAN

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight years.

LISSA

—Of living in embassies.—And I know nothing whatever about the Situation in the Near East, and I don't care a rap whether the Door to China is open or closed.

[ADRIAN gives the following questions rapidly, concisely.

ADRIAN

Do you know his family?

LISSA

Slightly.

ADRIAN

Is it a large one?

LISSA

He's the only child, I believe.

ADRIAN

Where did he go to school?

LISSA

I've forgotten.

ADRIAN

College?

LISSA

I think it was Harvard.

ADRIAN

How old is he?

LISSA

About thirty, I suppose.

ADRIAN

Clever? Amusing?

LISSA

Only so-so.

ADRIAN

Money?

LISSA

Enough, I expect.

ADRIAN

Sporting, I presume.—Play tennis? Golf? Polo?
[*She frowns at him, puzzled, then laughs.*]

LISSA

Religion? Politics? Size of collar?—As a matter of fact, I know very little about him. It's the silliest thing in the world, having him here, really it is. I wish you'd been less hospitable.

ADRIAN

The cable came—you were in Baltimore. It sounded as if he wanted to be asked, and had, in decency, to be answered.

LISSA

Not before consulting my exceedingly important wishes.

ADRIAN

I thought I was merely anticipating them.

LISSA

That, my dear man, is a thing you've got to learn: that you can't anticipate anyone's.

ADRIAN

Not those of a person I know as I do you?

LISSA

And how do you know me?

ADRIAN

Nearly ten years' worth.

LISSA

It's not enough. What about the twenty before?

ADRIAN

I could give you a complete history of each—from birth, in the first, with a silver spoon in your mouth, to début in the eighteenth, with two orchestras.

LISSA

And just what does my history prove?

ADRIAN

Well—here you are. . . .

LISSA

Knowing the—process of manufacture, you can fore-tell the product.

ADRIAN

Why, yes.

LISSA

Am I it, Adrian?

[They look at each other fixedly.]

ADRIAN (*finally*)

You're Lissa—my wife—and I love you. I love you, Lissa.

[She laughs.]

LISSA

There—that's better. Your first lesson—learned late, my dear!

ADRIAN

But you're different!

LISSA

So is everyone! That's the next lesson.

[FREDERIC *enters*.

FREDERIC

Mr. Bliss, sir.

LISSA

Yes. Will you have him come up? (FREDERIC *goes out*. For a moment LISSA *stands, thinking silently*.) What I *can't* make out, is why he came at all on such an invitation. Well, anyway—(She *goes to* ADRIAN, *puts her arms around him, and kisses him impulsively*.)—Good-bye, for a few days.

ADRIAN

What on earth!

LISSA (*gravely*)

We are no longer man and wife. We are host and hostess. (ADRIAN *laughs*. LISSA *assumes the manner of a hardened hostess*.) I think the Chinese treaty with Syria was a mere political manœuvre to force the Cornish fishermen into Biarritz.

ADRIAN

Hush, darling!

LISSA

But—can Article Seven, Paragraph Three, reduce the consumption of barley-water in the White House? Tell me *that*?

[NORRIE BLISS *enters from the hall*. He is thirty-two or three, well-built, well-dressed. Handsome, perhaps, but his charm lies principally in the impression he

gives of a fresh and youthful vitality. He carries a flat package, wrapped in tissue-paper, which he drops upon the desk. He goes at once to LISSA, and takes her hand, eagerly.

BLISS

Lissa! This is good!

LISSA

Dear Norrie. Isn't it?—You know Adrian, of course.

ADRIAN

Yes, indeed.

[He and BLISS shake hands.]

BLISS (*to them both*)

You're so nice to take me in, this way.

ADRIAN

It's the greatest pleasure, having you.

BLISS (*to LISSA*)

You got the hint in my cable admirably. After two weeks on the sea and another in a train, I couldn't endure the thought of a hotel—not even for two days.

ADRIAN

You must be worn out.

LISSA

Surely you'll be here more than two *days*?

[She seats herself in a chair by the table.]

BLISS

Washington the day after tomorrow. Then straight to Maine.

LISSA

Maine? So early?

BLISS

I can scarcely wait.

LISSA (*to* ADRIAN)

The diplomatist—isn't he polite?

BLISS

Do let me make all the breaks I like. I'm so sick of not making them. (*He seats himself facing LISSA.*) I've bought a farm in Maine—rather an enormous farm. Part of it's thick wood—virgin-forest, very nearly.—You might say flapper-forest.

LISSA

A pretty distinction.

ADRIAN

Very.

[*LISSA points to the package.*]

LISSA

What's that?

BLISS (*mysteriously*)

Shhhh! (*To* ADRIAN.)—Part's on the sea. I figure on spending some eight months of the year there.

ADRIAN

But what about your—job?

BLISS

I am on the point of changing jobs. Hence the détour, by way of Washington—with resignation in hand.

[LISSA *picks up the package and feels it.*

ADRIAN

Going back to Nature, eh?

BLISS

Back to Nature.

ADRIAN

That's interesting.—I'm doing the same thing, in a way.

BLISS

We'd best form a club. (*To LISSA.*) Put that down. (*LISSA, with the air of a child caught in a guilty act, replaces the package. BLISS to ADRIAN:*) The United Sons of Nature.

[*LISSA sits gazing at the package in fascination. He moves it behind the chair, out of the range of her vision.*

LISSA

Who cares what it is?

ADRIAN

I've a friend who claims there's not a really natural man at large.

BLISS

Send him to me: If he's plump, and I'm hungry, I'll have him for dinner.

LISSA

—If it isn't a present.

ADRIAN

Don't notice her.

[BLISS *gazes at her.*

BLISS

You'd have to be blind, I think.

[*A pause, which becomes a trifle awkward. Then:*

LISSA

—And if it isn't, then what is it? (BLISS *merely smiles.*) You fiend, you—what is that thing?

BLISS

Since you ask, a little gift for my hostess.

LISSA

What?

BLISS

For the sake of Auld Lang Syne. (ADRIAN *glances at him quickly.*) Three guesses.

LISSA

Auld Lang Syne?—A set of bagpipes.

BLISS

Perhaps "Sweet Memory's Sake" is better.

[ADRIAN's *smile becomes fixed.*

LISSA

You give that here! (*She snatches the package and tears it open, disclosing a white Chinese shawl, of beautiful and striking pattern. She exclaims with joy, then suddenly becomes grave, hugs it to her, and looks over it, to BLISS.*) Norrie!

[BLISS *affects to cover a yawn.*

BLISS

The merest trifle.

[LISSA *thrusts it toward* ADRIAN.]

ADRIAN

Beautiful. Simply beautiful.

LISSA (*to* BLISS)

Oh—*thanks*. . . . (*With a quick gesture, she whips the shawl out of its folds and about her shoulders.*)

I'll wear it to the theatre tonight.

[*She busies herself arranging the shawl more evenly about her.*]

ADRIAN

It's the second night of my latest—I should say "last" opus. The first real audience, you know. I hope it won't bore you.

BLISS

On the contrary, I should love to see it.

[LISSA *presents herself to them with the shawl now perfectly arranged.*]

LISSA

There! Who'll buy my violets?

BLISS

You lovely, lovely thing. You know, you haven't changed a particle.

LISSA

Isn't he nice, Adrian? (ADRIAN *smiles*. She *turns again to* BLISS.) Did he expect a kind of dried apricot?

BLISS

At least.

LISSA

Or perhaps I was pictured as more ample. (*She goes to the window.*)—Look—we have a view—(*She draws aside the window-curtains.* BLISS *goes to her side.*)—Heavenly, over here, isn't it?—The East River, in case you don't know.—And you don't find many gardens like *that* in New York!

BLISS

No—I should say you don't. (*Their backs are to ADRIAN. He stares at them fixedly.*) What's that—that little shoot of green, there?

LISSA

Where?—I don't see——

ADRIAN

Dear—isn't it tomorrow the Forellis are dining here?

LISSA

Thursday, yes. (*To* BLISS.) Where——?

ADRIAN

It's the first of May. That's a great day for Florentines.

[LISSA *turns absently, after a pause.*

LISSA

Oh, so it is. "Primavera," or something. . . . (*To* BLISS.) I don't see——

[*He points.*

ADRIAN

Suppose you let me plan a small *fiesta* for them to celebrate it.

LISSA

Do!

ADRIAN

Also to commemorate the return of us three truant-children of Nature to our Mother.

LISSA (*still absently*)

Of course!

ADRIAN

All I ask—(*He looks about him.*)—is permission to do as I like with this room. All right?

LISSA

Gladly! We'll be—(*She counts on her fingers.*)—six. (*To BLISS.*) Adrian's particularly good at *fiestas*. (*She smiles at ADRIAN.*) He was born a celebrator. (*Again she looks out the window.*) Where do you see any green, Norrie——
[BLISS *points once more.*

BLISS

There beside the path—to the left.

LISSA

Oh! It's the first one! It is! And an hour ago there wasn't a sign of it! (*She leans a little way out the window.*) Hello, you crocus——
[BLISS *turns to ADRIAN.*

BLISS

The crocus is plainly a piece of old bottle.

LISSA (*in high spirits*)

Come on! Let's go look! (*She goes to the hall door, speaking over her shoulder to BLISS:*) If it is, I'll

grind it up and put it in your tea. (*To ADRIAN.*) And forget what I said about going to meet the Spring. It's here already! It's arrived!—Come!

[*ADRIAN manages to laugh.*]

ADRIAN

I'll follow in a moment.

[*LISSA leaves her shawl on a chair by the door and goes out, BLISS after her. ADRIAN stands gazing into space, his presentiment taking a stronger and stronger hold upon him. A moment, then he goes toward the door, where he is brought up short by the sight of the shawl upon the chair. Suddenly his eyes begin to glint and his mouth hardens. He rings for FREDERIC, goes to the desk, seats himself, and calls sharply in the direction of the study.*]

ADRIAN

Miss Mabie! (*She appears in the doorway. From now until the end of the Act, ADRIAN speaks rapidly, and with a kind of hard, dry precision.*) What's Prendergast's address?

MISS MABIE

Prendergast, the agent?

ADRIAN

No, no!—Prendergast, in Philadelphia. His house.

MISS MABIE

"Cottonwood," Villa Nova.

[*ADRIAN notes the address.*]

ADRIAN

And will you please call Mr. Kendall—Gregory

Kendall. Something East Seventy-something. Ask him if he has any photographs of his small garden in Katonah. If so, I should like to borrow them for a day or two.

[*He begins to write a note.* MISS MABIE *goes into the study.* FREDERIC *enters from the hall.*

FREDERIC

Yes, sir?

ADRIAN (*as he writes and addresses the note*)

Frederic—we want to make dinner tomorrow something of an occasion—to celebrate May Day. Go to the florist—order plenty of Spring flowers—not all daffodils and hyacinths—some mimosa—wild flowers, if he can get them—and greens, lacey ferns, maiden-hair—lots of it. I'm having some flat-scenery sent from the theatre. If it's possible, this room is to be transformed into—into a kind of walled-garden.

FREDERIC (*nodding*)

And how many shall you be for dinner?

ADRIAN

Set six places.

FREDERIC

You remember that Mr. and Mrs. Forelli are not coming——

ADRIAN

Yes—but there may be others.—If, by any chance, there should not, if we should be only three, say, or—or even two—everything's to proceed just the same. You understand?

FREDERIC

Yes, sir.

[ADRIAN *stamps the note and gives it to him.* MISS MABIE *re-enters, in her hat and coat.*

ADRIAN (*to* FREDERIC)

It's possible that I may be called away by telegram at the last moment.—This is to go immediately. I want it in Philadelphia by morning.

[FREDERIC *bows and goes out.*

MISS MABIE

Mr. Kendall has the photographs, and will be very glad to lend you them. Shall I——?

ADRIAN

No. I'll send for them, later.—We're having a May Day party, Miss Mabie. I wish, in the morning, you'd go to the Library and dig out all the data you can on the various Spring festivals—the Primavera, the Planting, the Seed-Festivals, and the like——

MISS MABIE

Very well. (ADRIAN *goes to the window. She hesitates. Then:*) I—I suppose now that you've—left your profession, I shan't be needed any more.

ADRIAN

Nonsense! We couldn't think of parting with you. In a month you'll be quite as indispensable to Mrs. Terry as you've been to me.

MISS MABIE

I am not a social secretary, Mr. Terry.

[ADRIAN *is looking intently down into the garden.*

ADRIAN

What's that?—But I didn't say——

MISS MABIE

I shall stay only as long as I can be of service to you—and your work—and your happiness.

[She goes to the door.]

ADRIAN

But I tell you——

MISS MABIE (*from the door*)

Good-night, Mr. Terry.

[ADRIAN looks at her, sees that she means what she says, and shrugs.]

ADRIAN

Good-night.

[She goes out. ADRIAN turns again to the window.]

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

The Library, with the aid of flat-scenery, trellises, a carpet of grass and a profusion of flowers, greens, shrubs and leafy screens, has been transformed into something stealthily approaching the likeness of an old walled-garden.

It is desirable that the scene should undergo several changes in the course of the Act, these changes being regulated entirely by the lighting: at first, with some little daylight still coming from the windows, it is obviously a stage "exterior," of a kind of sinister artificiality; the "struts" that hold the gray garden-walls in place are plainly visible, and the walls, doorways, ceiling and windows of the surrounding Library may be seen almost as before. Later, with the dimming of the outside light, it begins gradually to take on more of the intended illusion. When the "moonlight" is first inadvertently turned on by LISSA, the effect should be one of enchantment, greenish, unnatural, owing to the mixture of the moonlight with the little remaining daylight from the windows. Toward the end of the Act, when it is entirely dark outside and ADRIAN again turns on the moonlight, the effect should be nearer—though never quite—that of an actual garden flooded with Spring moonlight.

The furniture has been replaced by a few stone benches, a large jar or two, and a stone table. On pedestals against the trellis at the back are four little

stone figures, representing the Four Seasons. A library-lamp has been left upon a table, behind a screen of greens against the trellis.

It is about seven o'clock the following evening. ADRIAN is arranging the last bit of vine upon the trellis at Back. FREDERIC is gathering stray pieces into a box.

ADRIAN

That ought to do, I think.

[FREDERIC carries the box to the dining-room doorway.]

FREDERIC

Will you look at the table, sir?

[ADRIAN goes and looks into the dining-room.]

ADRIAN

Oh, yes—it's much better without the cloth. Too many candles, though. Two are enough.

FREDERIC

For six people, sir?

ADRIAN

Two candles—there will be light from here. Besides, as I told you, we may not be six.—Where is Mrs. Terry?

FREDERIC

I think she is dressing. Shall I——?

ADRIAN

No, I don't need her. Has Mr. Bliss come in yet?

FREDERIC

I haven't heard him.

ADRIAN

Let me know when he does. (*FREDERIC goes out into the dining-room. ADRIAN advances into the Library. MISS MABIE appears in the hall doorway, wearing her hat and carrying a portfolio. She stops in surprise, at the change in the room.*) Lissa! You mustn't—oh, it's you, Miss Mabie. Come in—come in—it's all right.

MISS MABIE (*in admiration*)

Really, Mr. Terry, really!

ADRIAN

I was afraid you were—I didn't want Mrs. Terry or—the others to see it till this evening.

MISS MABIE

But however did you manage it?

ADRIAN

I've had a pair of stagehands working since noon and an electrician since three. It's what's left of the flier Roseman took in *Romeo and Juliet*. Do you like it?

MISS MABIE

Ye-es.—Of course it does look a trifle stagey.

ADRIAN

Now.—But our particular brand of moonlight would make palm-trees out of feather-dusters.

MISS MABIE

Moonlight?

[ADRIAN *points to the ceiling downstage.*

ADRIAN

Along there. Blue border.

MISS MABIE

Where? I don't—Ah yes! The trellis hides it.

ADRIAN

Extraordinary, what a difference it makes. A touch on that button and the library becomes a walled-garden under the Spring moon.

MISS MABIE

Fascinating! Let me see——

[ADRIAN *goes to the hall doorway and presses the switch button. Nothing happens.*

ADRIAN

What the devil!—Oh, of course: the electrician's gone to change the fuse. He'll be back shortly, I expect.

MISS MABIE

It's all very pretty—very pretty, indeed.—But the little statues—and the mimosa—*they* weren't in the photographs.

ADRIAN

I didn't want an exact copy.—Mail the photographs back to Mr. Kendall, will you?

MISS MABIE

—And shall I put yesterday's notes in the post for Mr. Compton?

ADRIAN

You'd better hold them a day or so. Something else may occur to me.

MISS MABIE

If—if I may say so——

ADRIAN

Say so? Say all you like! Say what?

MISS MABIE

I—I hope something else *does* occur.

ADRIAN

Oh? Why?

MISS MABIE

Because, as it stands, it seems to me you're putting the—idea ahead of the characters.

ADRIAN

It's the merest outline.

MISS MABIE

I realize that. But if the husband—I hope you'll excuse me, Mr. Terry——

ADRIAN

Go ahead.

MISS MABIE

If he—turns the clock back as you suggested, I think he'd run into complications—in the characters themselves, I mean.

ADRIAN

He'll take those into account.

MISS MABIE

Can he, though?

ADRIAN

I believe so. He knows people.

MISS MABIE

But—but they might get out of his hands.

ADRIAN

No more than *my* characters—whom *I* know—get out of mine.

MISS MABIE

Still—(*She regards him intently.*)—Aren't you feeling well, Mr. Terry?

ADRIAN

I?—Perfectly!

MISS MABIE

You look worn out.

ADRIAN

I was up rather late again. A night's sleep is all I need.

[*FREDERIC enters with a telegram. MISS MABIE extracts a sheaf of pencilled notes from her portfolio.*

MISS MABIE

I've collected quite a lot of information on the celebration of Spring Festivals in various countries.

ADRIAN

Thanks. Thanks very much.

FREDERIC

A telegram, sir.

[ADRIAN *takes it*. FREDERIC *turns to go*.

ADRIAN

Just a minute. (*To MISS MABIE.*) I'd—er—I'd like to have it all typed before dinner. Have you time?

MISS MABIE

Yes, indeed. Two carbons?

ADRIAN

One's enough. (*She goes into the study.* ADRIAN *gives the telegram back to FREDERIC.*) I don't want to be bothered now. Bring this back to me before dinner.

FREDERIC

I'll leave it here, sir.

[*He places it on the table.*

ADRIAN

No! Take it!—Bring it in before dinner—just before.

FREDERIC

But——

ADRIAN

Take it!

FREDERIC

I beg pardon, sir.

[*He goes into the dining-room with the telegram.*

ADRIAN *is left alone. He shakes his head impatiently, glances at his watch, then busies himself adjusting the properties of the setting. After a moment, LISSA, in evening dress, the shawl about her shoulders, enters from the hall. She is in rare good spirits.*

LISSA

Oh—how *nice*! My dear, it's quite lovely. . . .

ADRIAN

You wretch.

LISSA

Why?

ADRIAN

You weren't to see it yet.

LISSA

Never mind—I couldn't be more impressed. (*She looks about her, amused.*) It's enchanting, Adrian. Anything might happen here——

ADRIAN

Do you think so?

LISSA

Anything.—It's a pity you've given up writing, isn't it? (*He turns away, without answering.*) Is it too early to joke about that?

ADRIAN

Lissa——

LISSA

Adrian?

ADRIAN

Of course it's all settled that I *have* given it up——
[*She looks at him, oddly.*]

LISSA

Yes.

[*A pause.*]

ADRIAN

Why "yes"—just like that?

LISSA

Like what? (*A deep breath.*) Oh, this is lovely,
lovely.

ADRIAN

As if you didn't mean "yes" at all——

LISSA

Curious, then, that I shouldn't have said "no." Why!
It's mimosa! (*She breaks off a twig, smells it, and
fastens it upon her dress.*) Well—"now that it's all
settled"—what——?

ADRIAN

You don't want us—just living along haphazard,
without rhyme or reason, do you?

LISSA

I might like a little rhyme at times. I can always
manage without reason. Ouch! I stuck myself.

ADRIAN

Darling, I'm serious. Can't you see I want to talk
to you?

LISSA

I'm not far——

ADRIAN

I've got a great plan for you and me.
[*A pause.*]

LISSA

I've had a number of plans made for me, in my lifetime.

ADRIAN

Why does your voice do that?

LISSA

Do what?

ADRIAN

Go—suddenly tired, that way.

LISSA

I didn't know it did.—Adrian, what is it you're trying to persuade yourself of?

ADRIAN

Persuade myself?

LISSA

Yes—or justify yourself in?

ADRIAN

I thought I was merely telling you a plan I had.

LISSA

Very well: I'm listening.

ADRIAN

Well—our everyday existence, as we plan to lead it now—happy as it will be, there's bound to be waste in it, isn't there?

LISSA

I don't know what you mean by "waste."

ADRIAN

Days at a time, when nothing in particular happens. Whole weeks that drop out of it. Flat stretches—repetition—confusion—all for need of something to tie to. That's what we lack, Lissa—something to tie to. (*With emphasis.*) Some guiding idea.

LISSA (*after a moment*)

Oh? Such as?

ADRIAN

Well—something to make life an actual, true adventure—in place of the usual—er—Cook's tour into age. (*He rolls the phrase upon his tongue.*) The usual, uneventful Cook's tour into age.

LISSA

Yes—it *is* a good phrase.—Don't beat about the phrase-bush, Adrian.—Just—tell me the plan.

ADRIAN

I've a feeling you're not with me.

LISSA

What makes you think so?

ADRIAN (*smiling*)

I know something about audiences. (*She averts her head, suddenly.*) There you go again! Why do you do that with your head? What does it mean? Is it that you're——?

LISSA (*suddenly and sharply*)

Adrian, I— (*A brief pause. Then, calmly.*) I'm waiting so patiently to hear this—idea that's to guide my life.

ADRIAN

It's simplicity itself: First, look on life always with a dramatist's eye, get an angle—an *angle*—and keep to it. Then take the everyday material as any self-respecting dramatist does—and arrange—select—condense——

LISSA

I'm sorry, but I'm afraid that for me, life's got to be taken whole. I can't imagine it otherwise. It's—just the feel of it I love so—the unexpectedness. . . .

ADRIAN

But my dear—there need be nothing unexpected in this world! *You* know that!

LISSA

No, I don't.

ADRIAN

Then it's time you did. Because I assure you, there's cause and effect wherever you look—a basic reason for everything.

LISSA

Why is it birds fly, Adrian—instead of walking soberly along the ground?

ADRIAN

Because a pterodactyl once got ambitious and climbed a tree, that's why.

LISSA

You're not really going to *tell* me!

ADRIAN

—Fell down, and climbed it again. Then, through a gradual evolution lasting for——

LISSA

I don't want to hear!

ADRIAN

Dig deep enough into anything, and you'll come on a substratum of unconscious motive. You can't escape that.

LISSA

I can escape digging.

ADRIAN

But *Lissa*—not one instant exists without its point, its significance. It's merely the consciousness of the point, the significance, that I'm arguing for. "Life lived as high comedy"!—*There's* our guiding idea! High comedy—with ourselves as dramatists and characters too—directors and scene-shifters—actors and audience—yes!—audience, as well!

LISSA

And you believe things *can* be got at that way?

ADRIAN

Why not?—We can apply to life what we've learned in the theatre: then each minute thing we see, or do, or hear, or feel will take on color and flavor—become vital, electric——

LISSA

But things do have color, for me. Things *are*—very vital to me.

ADRIAN

But they must contribute something—express something—relate somehow to the *idea*—the idea upon which the whole plan builds itself.—And the scope of it—think! There's no limit—no horizon! The whole world—life itself—*everything* is transformed!

LISSA

—As it is in the theatre.

ADRIAN

Exactly as it is in the theatre!—You see?

[*A pause.* LISSA looks fearfully about her, at the setting.]

LISSA

And this—is this part of it? Our—starting-place, maybe?

[ADRIAN laughs.]

ADRIAN

Oh now come, dear. You're——

LISSA

And yesterday I thought you had—(*Suddenly.*)—I'm scared, Adrian.

ADRIAN

Of what?

LISSA (*in a breath*)

I don't know! I'm scared!

ADRIAN

Lissa—really—there's no "reason to——

LISSA

No! Let's not talk any more of it! Not now. Later, perhaps, but not now—no—no—(*She glances about her again, endeavoring to compose herself.*) The Forellis will adore it, won't they?

ADRIAN

But you haven't got what I'm driving at. What I meant was——

LISSA

—Especially Tony. Can't you see his big face shine?

ADRIAN

Lissa, the real point of my idea is that——

LISSA

You've been so clever with it. How well you do things! How *finished* everything you do, is. (*He gestures helplessly, beaten. She glances into the dining-room.*) I've never seen such a table. If Tony stays sober and Bianca doesn't eat too much——

ADRIAN (*after a pause*)

The Forellis can't come.

LISSA

Can't *come*? At this hour?

ADRIAN

Bianca telephoned that little Tony's ill.

LISSA

Oh, the poor darling. I hope it's not the flu'. It's all

over town. Janet said that all three of her children—And poor you, too,—after all your pretty plans.

ADRIAN

You and Bliss and I will have to celebrate by ourselves.

LISSA

We might get some others to fill in. I'll telephone the Remsens——

ADRIAN

Haven't they sailed?

LISSA

Peter Farrell and Zöe——

ADRIAN

Oh no, dear—not for this sort of thing. Let's just keep it to ourselves. What time is it, anyway?

LISSA

Seven-thirty, nearly.

[He starts toward the hall.]

ADRIAN

I'd better step.—But there's another surprise. Don't touch anything, will you?

LISSA (*dully*)

No, I won't touch anything.

[At the door, he turns.]

ADRIAN

Lissa—*why* is it that you——?

[She looks directly into his eyes, and shakes her head, slowly. Then:]

LISSA

You'd better dress, don't you think?

[ADRIAN returns from the hall-doorway and goes out into the dining-room instead. LISSA is left alone. For one instant, she presses her fingers hard against her temples. Then she begins to tour the room, arranging little things here and there in an attempt to stay the disillusionment which is pressing in upon her. BLISS enters from the hall, dressed for dinner. He shops short at the sight of the room.

BLISS

Well, I'll be——! (LISSA exclaims. He takes a deep breath.) Hasn't it got a nice smell!

LISSA

But you weren't supposed to come in yet!

BLISS

I come in when I like, ma'am.—What do you have to do in this house—move on cues?

LISSA

Can you be surprised twice?

BLISS

Oftener.

LISSA

There's a bench, if you like.

BLISS

The ground's softer.

[He seats himself upon the floor, facing her. The daylight from the window has now dimmed considerably.

LISSA

This is perfect high comedy atmosphere, I'll have you know. We must lend ourselves to it. (*She hands him an imaginary cup.*) Won't you have some tea?

BLISS (*affectedly*)

Thanks, so much.

[LISSA continues in the manner of a drawing-room comedy of the 'nineties:

LISSA

Nine lumps, or twenty-one?—One gives tea to so many people in the course of a season, one forgets what one would remember—if you know what I mean.

BLISS

No sugar. Salt.

LISSA

Salt.

BLISS

Salt.

[*She smiles sweetly and gives it to him. They pretend to drink their tea.*

LISSA

—They say dear Lady Vi is seen much, of late, in the company of that Italian.

BLISS

Let us trust she does not lose too much in translation.

[LISSA laughs, archly.

LISSA

And to what discreet indiscretions have *you* devoted yourself today?

BLISS

I've been Spring-shopping.

LISSA

Ah?—For what——?

BLISS

Farm tractors.

LISSA

Did you find some nice ones?

BLISS

I compromised on an apple-green necktie, with dots.

LISSA

I'm so glad you're finding our city agreeable.
(*Softly.*) Comedy, young man, comedy.

BLISS

New York is lovely in Spring.

LISSA

—Streets full of people, in their gay attire.— Comedy, high comedy—

BLISS

Spring is the time.

LISSA

Spring's the time.

BLISS

Hot Springs.

LISSA

Hot Springs eternal——

BLISS

——in the Golden West.

LISSA

South, though.

BLISS

It doesn't matter.

LISSA

It's better than Winter, Spring.

BLISS

Better than Summer.

LISSA

Better than Autumn.

BLISS

Better than all.

LISSA

Spring is the time!

BLISS

For all good men——

LISSA

——to come to the aid of—(*She falters.*)—of——
[*She cannot go on.*]

BLISS (*with spirit*)

As we go marching through Georgia!

[*LISSA sits staring at her handkerchief.*]

LISSA (*recovering*)

There's a hole in the bottom of the sea——

BLISS

Good, in everything.

[*She shows him her handkerchief.*]

LISSA

Look—my initials upside down are the same as right-side-up.

BLISS

Amazing!

LISSA

True, though.

BLISS

I dressed in ten minutes, in the hope of a moment with you before the others came.

LISSA

Which just might account for my dressing early, too.

BLISS (*starting forward*)

You darling!

LISSA

I think you're spilling your tea.

[*A brief pause.*]

BLISS

Haven't you had enough of it, Lissa?

LISSA (*wearily*)

More than——

BLISS

Then let's not.

LISSA

Let's never. (*He tosses his imaginary tea-cup to one side. She tosses hers to the other, then glances about her.*) But you like this—arrangement?

BLISS

It reminds me of some place—I don't quite know what. Do you?

LISSA

I like it well enough.

BLISS

Only you don't like anything, much—is that it?

LISSA

Oh yes!—I like a thousand things—I *love* a thousand things.

BLISS

What for instance?

LISSA

Oh—my own things—simple things.

BLISS

Name ten.

LISSA

Would you really like to know?

BLISS

I really should.

[*She regards him thoughtfully for a moment, then begins to count them off on her fingers.*]

LISSA

Then—ships—and shoes, too—if they're slippers, instead. Sealing-wax, of course—heavenly stuff. Kings, but not cabbages. Pine-woods. Alligator pears. Old tombstones, and small, fresh yellow ducks. Not chickens. Chickens are less charming. Blue larkspur. Altars. Ten——

BLISS

Ten more!

LISSA

Folk-songs, if they're unintelligible. Sulphur-matches. Quiet pools. Picket fences. The red-brown of old cows' eyes. Crystal. Rhubarb for breakfast. Milk bottles jangling at dawn. Great, sodden bumble-bees. Waking up. Laughter. The footprints dreams leave . . . (*She throws out her hands.*) More than a thousand! Many, many more! (*A pause. Then, lowly.*) But no one knows *why* I like them—myself least of all. And they don't contribute to anything—express anything—relate to anything.—People say that they must though.

BLISS

Not I!

LISSA

You don't? (*BLISS shakes his head. Suddenly she leans forward with lowered brows and points her finger at him.*) But what about the “substratum of uncon-

scious motive"? You can't get away from *that*, can you?

BLISS

I can get away from whatever I like.

LISSA

But my dear man! Basic reasons!—For such things as—as the flight of birds, say.—You actually insist that the fact of their originally being—er—pterodactyls, who happened to live in trees—you actually insist that that means nothing at all to you?

BLISS

They could have been lavender giraffes, with long magenta tails. They could have lived in old cabooses under the sea, so long as they fly, fly, keep flying.

LISSA (*in a whisper*)

It's miraculous.—You're a strange man, Norrie—one feels like a child, with you. That's—an almost forgotten joy, for me. (*She averts her head.*) There flows the sea, there fly the birds, here live I. (*She bends her head, and, with her little finger, begins to trace the fine lines in her palm. Her words are like a low chant.*) Oh, grasshoppers hop, and field-mouses mouse, and Wise Ones write books on isms, whys and wherefores. But people live, and love, and die, and the same old world keeps turning just the samee, same, same, same. . . . (*She clasps her hands at the nape of her neck and gazes up at the ceiling. The room is now almost dark.*) Stars. I wish I had a star.—Or a baby. But I shan't ever have either. Sad, isn't it?

BLISS

Lissa, do you want to break my heart?

LISSA

Is it you, Norrie?—I can scarcely see. . . . (*A moment, then she leans over and pats his cheek with two fingers. He catches her hand, and kisses it. Slowly she draws it away from him.*) Dear Norrie—let me be nice to you. I think I've waited a long time, to be nice to you.

BLISS

This garden——

LISSA

Tell me about your farm.

[*A pause. Then BLISS begins, in a brave endeavor to be matter-of-fact.*

BLISS

Four hundred acres in all—counting the timberland.

LISSA

Woods?

BLISS

Plenty of them.

LISSA

Near the sea, you said.

BLISS

A few hundred yards of rocky coast.

LISSA

Ah!

BLISS

It was my uncle's. The house is nearly a hundred years old. The plumbing is five.

LISSA

—Hundred?

BLISS

Years.

LISSA

The real heavenly mansion.

[BLISS *laughs*.

BLISS

The rooms are few, and long and wide. The sun rises and sets in them. There are a thousand-odd books in the library.

LISSA

The books—interest you?

BLISS

Not much. But I think my uncle chose the bindings for their colors.

LISSA

The dear!

BLISS

Near the rhubarb-patch, ducks—yellow ducks—are forever being hatched. Cows are everywhere, each with two red-brown eyes. Up the road a way, there's an old, overgrown graveyard, containing, as graveyards do, tombstones. You go down a gravel path to the garden, where the air is sweet with fox-glove,

cinnamon-pinks, larkspur—blue. I shan't grow cabbages, but I shall keep bees.

LISSA (*her face shining*)

Bumble-bees! Big fellows!

BLISS

Over beyond a very quiet pool, where I learned to swim, you climb a steep rock to the watch-tower, where you see the ships pass, on their way to somewhere——

LISSA

Mmm——

BLISS

In the pine-woods, magic dwells. At night the sea is a filigree of silver, through the trees. . . .

[LISSA *looks at him, oddly.*

LISSA

What a charming way to put it.

BLISS

Pine needles cover the ground like—like——

LISSA

——like pine needles, Norrie. (*A pause.*) There are to be no bushes there?

BLISS

Bushes?

LISSA

——Phrase-bushes—to beat about.

[BLISS *turns away from her, and rises.*

BLISS

I'm sorry, if I've sounded like a real-estate agent.

LISSA

It's just that I prefer things themselves to—pretty phrases about them. (*A brief pause.*) Tell me what you *want* of your farm?

BLISS

My soul's salvation, merely.

LISSA (*softly*)

Ah—that's good!—Just living there—quite without plans—it does sound heavenly.

[*In a moment he is at her side, bending above her.*]

BLISS

Lissa! If only——

[*She rises.*]

LISSA (*quickly*)

Yes—you must ask us to visit, sometime. We'd love it, I'm sure.

[*BLISS gestures helplessly. Perplexed, he again surveys the scene about him.*]

BLISS (*murmuring*)

I don't know what's got into me.

LISSA (*continuing*)

That is, if we can somehow fit it into our plans. Our *plan* rather—(*BLISS is still puzzling over the scene.*)—People are so kind, the way they relieve me of responsibility. You've no idea of the happy life I lead. There's rhyme to it—and reason, too! So—ordered. So well-arranged.

BLISS

But I'd have thought you——

LISSA

——didn't like plans? I give you my word, I've had scarcely a moment without them, since birth.

BLISS

And you *like* it?

LISSA

Shouldn't I?—Think of the comfort of knowing that everything must fall into place, just so. That the unexpected simply doesn't exist. One day to another: certain things happen to you—pleasant, agreeable things. You needn't lift a finger. But should you chance to, it's all right—you find that lifted fingers have been allowed for, in the plans. Marvellous!—Everything happens as it's been ordained to happen, by whoever it is who's in charge at the time—a kind nurse, a governess, a teacher, an aunt—a more than kind husband!

BLISS

Now I can follow you, Lissa—and I can see what a rotten job it's been for you.

LISSA

But how stupid, Norrie! Why, I live in the happiest sphere imaginable: just this side of reality. Reality itself is too harsh a climate: I'd shrivel. *My* place is in a play, in a nice well-made play, where every word, every move, every feeling even, must square with the guiding idea.

BLISS

What on earth are you talking about?

LISSA

Don't be rude. Rudeness withers me. I'm too delicate. I can't stand it. Let me explain, merely, why my life is so happy. (*Her voice rises.*) Look at me, Norrie. You think you see a person, here—body and soul? Don't fool yourself. I'm just an imaginary being. You've just seen me act "Lissa Terry."—I'm a character, drawn with such *masterly* skill. None of your human confusion in *my* make-up—I do nothing without point, significance—there's an *idea* behind me!

BLISS

What *are* you saying, Lissa?

LISSA

—Lines—speeches—things I've been taught.—And when I move about—(*She moves away from him.*)—so—well, *that's* according to plan, too! Stage-business, my dear!

BLISS

It's this place—this house. I tell you there's something funny about it.

LISSA

Look! (*Very deliberately she picks up a vase and puts it down again.*) You'd think I did that myself, wouldn't you?—And for no reason at all. Yes, so I did.— But I assure you I was meant to do it, and then to think and say I did it by myself. It relates—oh, it relates!

BLISS

Don't, Lissa. It's uncanny, really.

LISSA

Simple cause and effect, uncanny? (*She looks at him, penetratingly.*) You—how do you know *you're* not imagined, as well? (*She stiffens, suddenly, and gasps.*) If you are! (*She sinks down upon the bench.*) People I'm forever meeting—places I'm forever going—they've an awful way of suddenly seeming part of the fiction—like dreaming, and knowing it! (*She covers her face.*) If you knew the horrible feeling it is. . . .

BLISS (*after a moment*)

I think I do. I think it's just that, I've been feeling here.

LISSA

No. It's nothing but nerves. You've caught mine.

BLISS (*indicating the room*)

Look about you, Lissa. (*She looks about her, apprehensively.*) Does it—recall anything to you?

LISSA

No. But—but—(*Her voice trails off.*)—it—seems I've—been here before. . . .

BLISS

I've the same sensation. It's odd, you know. It's damned odd. (*He frowns, murmuring.*) Where? Where?

LISSA (*almost in a whisper*)

It's dark here. *Are* we in this room, Norrie? I mean

—*actually?*—Able to think, put words together, say what we want?—Or are we just—imagined, *fixed*, for all time—making the same set gestures, speaking the same set lines—as we have in other performances?—As we shall in more to come? (*Thoughtfully, with a very slow movement, BLISS leans over, picks up a stray flower from the floor, puts it in a stone jar beside the bench, and rises. The effect is similar to that of a slow-motion moving-picture. LISSA watches him in growing horror.*) Don't—don't!

BLISS

Don't what? (*Without answering, she turns away and shuts her eyes. BLISS shakes himself.*) Come on—let's get out of it.

LISSA

You *do* hear me—you do see me, don't you, Norrie? You wouldn't be fooled. I *am* real to you!

BLISS (*nervously*)

Of course. Of course!

LISSA (*the chill striking deeper*)

I've never felt it so horribly before. I can almost feel the tug of each separate string, making me jump this way, that way. (*Her voice sinks, awesomely.*) Are we all like that? Is that what's meant, do you suppose, when we're called "God's creatures"? Is it—just that not all of us *feel* the strings, as I do?

BLISS (*moving toward the door*)

Come on, will you?

LISSA (*rising*)

I won't have it! I won't! Strings, are they? Well,

I'll break them! (*She circles the room, touching things here and there.*) There—there! I'll move too fast for them—I'll tangle them up—snap them! There, Guiding Idea, was I meant to tear that flower to bits? There, Director—where's the motive for that? What on earth does *that* mean?

[*She is close to hysteria.* BLISS watches her in alarm.

BLISS

Lissa—please—please, dear——

LISSA

Watch! Every night about now, Frederic comes and turns on the lights. Like clockwork—on cue, you'd think! Enter Frederic— But tonight, *I* shall! See? (*She goes swiftly toward the hall door.*) A little out of gear now, aren't you, Pretty Plans? Well, however pretty you are, I'll destroy you, see? *I'll* make my plans! (*She presses the electric button. From its hidden source, the "moonlight" comes on, flooding the room with a greenish, eerie light, mixed, as it is, with the little remaining light from the window.* LISSA exclaims in terror.) Agh! (*Her hand flies to her mouth, and she backs away from the doorway toward BLISS, in whose eyes recognition of the scene is now dawning.* LISSA's shoulder touches him. Suddenly she turns and buries herself in his arms, shaking with fright.) What is it? What is it?

BLISS

Do you know where we are?

[*Slowly she raises her head and glances fearfully about her.*

LISSA (*barely audibly*)

Tell me—what it is. . . .

BLISS

It's very much like Kendall's garden.

LISSA (*puzzled*)

"Kendall's"—? (*Again she looks about her, then clings to him in fear.*) How? How?

BLISS

Did you ever tell anyone?

LISSA

Nobody.—And I'm sure no one knew.

BLISS

Not—your husband, by any chance?

LISSA (*shaking her head*)

No way possible. What—was there to tell?

BLISS

I kissed you, Lissa.

LISSA

I know—but I was somebody else—Columbine wasn't it? At costume parties I was always Columbine. It was as though things were happening not to me at all, to someone else. I thought I was acting. Now I think—*this* makes me think—(*The words come trooping out, as through a door suddenly opened.*)—it was the one time in my whole life I wasn't! (*Her voice rises.*) My illusion—it *was* real! I want my illusion back!

BLISS

Dear——

[*Her grasp tightens upon his arms, holding him from taking her in them.*]

LISSA

Now I see!—Norrie—this likeness—it's a sign—to show me that one night there in that garden as the one living thing in my life—the one thing ever, that happened without plan! A sign! (*She throws her hand up, hailing it.*) Oh—welcome, Sign, welcome!

BLISS (*with difficulty*)

But Lissa—let me tell you——

LISSA

Wait—while I can still see so clearly! (*A brief pause.*) That garden-door—it led through to life. I left my life in that garden.

BLISS

Come back to it. Come, dear——

LISSA

Everything since—shadows, unreality. *Is* it still there—my life? *Would* it be real, Norrie?

BLISS

I promise you it will be real.

LISSA

—Just to be something more than this queer kind of phantom. Just to *feel* things again—(*She looks at him searchingly.*)—Do you think you love me?
[*BLISS's face works. He smiles; spasmodically.*]

BLISS

I think I do.

[LISSA *averts her head.*

LISSA

I don't know yet, whether I——

BLISS

Let that wait. You come in whatever capacity you wish, you know.

LISSA

That's like you. Thanks. (*She ponders.*) Adrian—I love Adrian's heart—but his mind—it's swallowed it up—and me with it, nearly. Adrian. Adrian. Oh, it isn't so easy!

BLISS (*very matter-of-fact*)

I'll leave for Washington at eight in the morning, and get the Federal back, tomorrow night. There'll be a drawing-room on it for you, through to Boston—in your name, at the window.

[*A pause.*

LISSA (*slowly, fearfully*)

Tonight—I could tell you all a story about what happened once to a girl and a boy on a Spring night in a garden. After I'd gone, he'd think back, and know who they were. Then he'd—just apply some rule of human conduct. He has one already for it—"Every wife—every wife, at heart"—oh, *poor man!* Poor Adrian, with his false little rules. (*She pauses, thoughtfully.*) Adrian—you—myself—which, Norrie? Oh, pray that something may show me quickly!

BLISS

Then it isn't all settled?

[LISSA *shakes her head.*

LISSA

No.—But look for me the next morning. Boston.
The South Station.

BLISS

Is there another telephone downstairs?

LISSA

In the coat-room, off the hall.

BLISS

I'll get the porter at the club to make reservations.
(*He goes to the hall-doorway.*) Shall I turn this off?

LISSA

Will you?

[BLISS *touches the button beside the door, extinguishing the moonlight and leaving the room in almost total darkness. For a moment, LISSA is left alone, huddled upon one of the stone benches. MISS MABIE enters from the study, and looks at her silently. Then she clears her throat.*

MISS MABIE

Hasn't—? (*Simultaneously, LISSA exclaims in fright and rises.*)—It's only Miss Mabie.

LISSA

I didn't hear you come in.

MISS MABIE

—Hasn't Mr. Terry done wonderful things with this simple room?

LISSA (*wearily*)

Indeed he has.

[MISS MABIE *sighs*.

MISS MABIE

Art. Pure art——

LISSA

Oh, I'm sick to death of it.

[*A pause. Then:*

MISS MABIE

I've always rather felt you—belonged more to the earth.

LISSA (*softly*)

The blessed earth. Glory be to grass growing. Glory be to the earth.

[MISS MABIE *goes to her and rests her hand upon her shoulder*.

MISS MABIE

Amen, my dear. (*In a quick movement LISSA turns and buries her head in MISS MABIE's breast.*) There—there—never mind, dear.

[*She strokes her head as she would that of a forlorn little child.*

LISSA

Oh, why didn't you let me know I had someone so near me? I've needed someone so.

MISS MABIE

There, dear—we know it now.

LISSA (*with difficulty*)

Adrian—he——

MISS MABIE

It all comes of living so long with people he's made for himself.

LISSA

We're his characters, too. He knows every move. There's no mystery in us.

MISS MABIE

He shall see that there is. We shall make him acknowledge it.

LISSA

I've tried.

[*A pause.*]

MISS MABIE

Then *I* shall try. (*She laughs nervously.*) If the solved and simple Miss Mabie breaks out of her pigeonhole——

[*LISSA lifts her head and looks at her, finding hope.*]

LISSA

Oh, God love you, you dear thing——

[*She kisses her and turns away.* ADRIAN *enters from the hall, dressed for dinner.*]

ADRIAN

Still here, Lissa?

LISSA

Still here.

ADRIAN

Dark, isn't it?

LISSA

Yes.

[ADRIAN *goes to the table behind the screen.*

ADRIAN

I wonder what's keeping Bliss. He wasn't in his room.
(*He lights the lamp on the table.*) We cut off everything but this.

[FREDERIC *enters from the hall, with the telegram.*

FREDERIC

The telegram, sir.

[ADRIAN *opens the telegram, as FREDERIC methodically turns to press the electric switch-button beside the door.*

ADRIAN

Hold on! That doesn't work, now.

FREDERIC

To be sure. I remember you said. Beg pardon, sir.
[*He goes into the dining-room.* ADRIAN *reads the telegram.*

ADRIAN

Oh Lord—what a nuisance!

LISSA

What is it?

ADRIAN

It's from Prendergast. He says it's very important that I meet him in Philadelphia tonight.

[*He gives the telegram to LISSA. MISS MABIE is watching him.*

LISSA

Telephone him, and say it's impossible.

ADRIAN

Prendergast wouldn't make a demand like that without some reason for it. I'd best try for the Eight O'clock. Will you call the car for me, Miss Mabie?

[MISS MABIE *goes into the study.*

LISSA

But Adrian—what about dinner?

ADRIAN

Four-and-twenty blackbirds—and now there are two. I'll be back tomorrow, early. You and Bliss enjoy my party. If the table rocks, it's my spirit, over from Philadelphia.

[LISSA *regards him intently.*

LISSA

I don't like the way things fall out.

ADRIAN

Fall out?

[*She moves toward the hall-door.*

LISSA

I don't like it at all.

ADRIAN

Lissa—(*She turns. For a moment they regard each other without speaking. Then:*)—What is it, dear?

LISSA

I don't think I can live your way, Adrian—your

“high comedy” way. I’d die by inches. I’ve begun to die already.

ADRIAN

Why, Lissa—darling—you——

LISSA

Something’s taken hold of me. I feel—possessed by something. I—(*She looks about her, in terror.*) Oh—it’s a crazy thing!

[*She goes swiftly to the hall-door, and out.* ADRIAN takes a step after her.

ADRIAN

Lissa——

[*He stops himself.* MISS MABIE re-enters from the study, carrying a few pages of typewritten notes, which she places upon the desk. In some way, she is coming through her dimness, her hesitancy, into a steadily growing assurance.

MISS MABIE

The Spring Festival notes. I’ve quoted rather freely. —William wasn’t at the garage. I called a taxi.

ADRIAN

Thanks. I’d better get my coat on. (*He goes to the door.* MISS MABIE follows him with her eyes. *He switches on the moonlight.*) Good-night, Miss Mabie. I shall be back by tomorrow evening, at the latest.

MISS MABIE

—And will you be going off to Boston right away, with Mrs. Terry?

ADRIAN

Boston?

MISS MABIE

As I was calling the garage—wasn't it you on the downstairs' telephone, ordering a drawing-room on the Federal?

ADRIAN

Not I, no.

MISS MABIE

Then I must have been on a crossed wire. Queer, though—I was sure I heard you say that the tickets were to be held at the window in Mrs. Terry's name. [ADRIAN *turns from the door and slowly re-enters the room.*

ADRIAN

You—you were mistaken.

MISS MABIE

Apparently. (*A pause.*) Mr. Terry——

ADRIAN

What?

MISS MABIE

I don't think I'd go away tonight if I were you.

ADRIAN (*harshly*)

Why not?

MISS MABIE

I—just don't think I should. I shouldn't dare.

[*A pause—then:*

ADRIAN (*to himself*)

Complications—complications.

MISS MABIE

Why not try introducing another character, Mr. Terry? (*He looks at her intently.*) Or better still, bring up a minor figure—one who's been in from the beginning? That's helped you before, to—to solve unforeseen difficulties in a scene.

[*For an instant she reverts to her former uncertain self, avoids his gaze, and begins fumbling at her notes.*

FREDERIC comes in from the dining-room, with a tray containing a cocktail-shaker and six glasses.

BLISS enters from the hall.

BLISS

Lord! Isn't this marvellous!

[FREDERIC fills the glasses.

ADRIAN

Do you like it?—Oh—my secretary, Miss Mabie—Mr. Bliss. (*To FREDERIC.*) I'll serve them.

MISS MABIE

How do you do?

BLISS

How do you do? (*To ADRIAN.*) Extraordinary, really. How on earth did you contrive such a realistic effect?

ADRIAN

It's just a little remnant from an old career.

[LISSA re-enters from the hall.

LISSA

Your taxi is here. Ah—moonlight——

ADRIAN

I'm not going. I think the morning will do as well.

LISSA

You sent word? I'm so glad. Give the driver something, Frederic. But perhaps you'll take him, Miss Mabie? It's quite late.

[*A brief pause. Then MISS MABIE rallies.*

MISS MABIE

Mr. Terry has asked me to stay and dine with you.

[*ADRIAN stares, then busies himself with the cocktails.*

MISS MABIE *nervously fingers her notes.*

LISSA

And you will, of course! We should love having you. (*Indicating the notes.*) Is that all about the great feast?—You must teach us the ways in which we should go.

[*FREDERIC goes out into the hall. LISSA takes a glass from ADRIAN and gives it to MISS MABIE. She then takes one herself. ADRIAN gives one to BLISS, who swallows it in a gulp.*

MISS MABIE

I find that the—er—customs in the tropical countries are—er—well, uncivilized, to say the least.

LISSA

I don't doubt it for a minute.

BLISS (*simultaneously*)

Tell us more!

ADRIAN

As usual in such things, the less the longitude, the greater the latitude. (*To BLISS.*) Let me give you a little more.

BLISS (*holding his glass*)

Thanks.—I've never found anything so useful in an artificial existence, for bringing a man back to Nature.

MISS MABIE

I wonder if that is true?

BLISS

I assure you it is.—Or a woman.

MISS MABIE

They say it gives one courage, as well.

[*ADRIAN refills BLISS's glass. MISS MABIE finishes hers in one swallow, and watches the shaker. BLISS laughs, somewhat embarrassedly, and says:*

BLISS

I haven't said anything about your play last night. I'm afraid you cut things a little too fine for me. I'm not keen on hair-splitting.

ADRIAN

Aren't you? (*He holds the shaker out to MISS MABIE.*) Miss Mabie? (*She extends her glass quickly. He refills it, then turns again to BLISS, smiling.*) Perhaps you prefer heart-breaking? (*BLISS's face changes. LISSA glances quickly at ADRIAN, then replaces her empty glass upon the tray and goes to the window. MISS MABIE, glass in hand, reads over her notes.*)

I grant you, it's usually more successful—as drama.

LISSA (*looking out the window*)

I've never known a more perfect night. (*She lifts her hands, palms upward, weighing the air.*) The air feels like feathers. (*She opens the window wide, and returns to the others.*) Come—shall we?

[*She moves toward the dining-room.*]

MISS MABIE (*quoting from her notes*)

“ . . . The peasants would flock down from the neighboring hills, to the spot where the *fiesta* was to take place. Mother Nature smiles upon the antics of her children. All through the flower-strewn day, there is dancing and dalliance. The finest native wines are lavishly poured into vast bowls, from which they are as freely quaffed. . . .”

[*She finishes her cocktail and goes toward the dining-room, followed by ADRIAN and BLISS.*]

ADRIAN

I see I should have ordered bowls for the champagne.

MISS MABIE

A detail—disregard it. . . . “By evening, the celebrants have paired off into couples. The warm air is charged with romance. . . . Some gaily, some with hushed whispers, steal forth from the company to nearby olive-groves. . . .” (*LISSA has now gone into the dining-room. The curtain begins to descend.*)

“ . . . There, beneath the moon, troths are plighted, and other ceremonies take place, the—er—nature of which is fully discussed in Salini's ‘*La Fiesta d'Amore*.’ Suffice it to say, that for years, both

Church and State have directed their combined wits toward the discouragement of such pagan ritualism, in a thus-far vain endeavor to bring about its—*(The curtain falls.)*—discontinuance.”

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

The scene is the same. An hour later. Dinner is over. ADRIAN and BLISS are seated by the stone table, Right Center, upon which there is a coffee-service and a decanter of brandy, with two small glasses. LISSA comes in from the hall and joins them.

LISSA

Really, Adrian, I'm a little worried about Miss Ma-bie.

ADRIAN

My dear, it's impossible. I know her like a book.

LISSA

But people do take queer turns at times, don't they? (*To BLISS, as she seats herself.*) That's what Adrian refuses to admit.

ADRIAN

But I tell you I know her! Inside out!

LISSA

Tagged and pigeon-holed—yes. Still, for all that, she might be a different woman tonight, mightn't she—*mighn't* she, Adrian?

ADRIAN

Not at all. We're merely seeing her for the first time in another capacity.

BLISS

It appears that she's more than reached it. How long is it you've had her?

ADRIAN

Oh, about seven years.

LISSA

And now—honestly—have you the remotest idea what she's going to do or say next? Oh, *admit* you haven't, Adrian!

ADRIAN

Of course I have!

BLISS

—Attribute it to the moon. If tides change on account of it, why shouldn't people? (*He squints upward.*) This one's particularly tricky. When Lissa first turned it on this afternoon, all of a sudden I thought——

ADRIAN (*frowning*)

When Lissa turned it on——?

BLISS

I mean, when——

ADRIAN (*to LISSA*)

Did you light it?

LISSA

By accident. I didn't realize——

ADRIAN

And you were here?

BLISS

Yes. I had just—happened in, you know.

LISSA

But I made him promise to be surprised again, so as not to disappoint you.

ADRIAN

Oh, that didn't matter. But—it must have given you a start, eh?

BLISS

It did, a little—both of us. As I was saying, all at once I had a vision of another garden like it—one I'd seen some time ago. . . .

ADRIAN (*with studied casualness*)

Yes?—Where?

BLISS

I couldn't quite remember.—And they must be rather rare, you know. (*He leans forward looking directly into ADRIAN's eyes.*) Perhaps, if you'd tell me where it is that the original exists, I might——

ADRIAN

As a matter of fact, one could hardly say it does exist. It's—er—more or less a composite of—er—of—er—(*He looks toward the hallway, and exclaims, softly.*) What in the world!

[MISS MABIE enters from the hall. She has discarded her nose-glasses and wears a flower in her hair, which has been most becomingly re-dressed. Long earrings hang from her ears. About her shoulders, enveloping

nearly her entire figure, is LISSA's Chinese shawl. Her nose has been powdered, and there is a touch of rouge upon her lips and cheeks. Her eyes are dancing. She is, indeed, like another woman. BLISS smiles. ADRIAN gazes at her in astonishment, LISSA, in genuine admiration, as she pauses at the doorway to pluck two jonquils from the decorations.

MISS MABIE (*to LISSA*)

I felt my everyday costume hardly fitting for so gay an occasion. Your maid insisted upon re-arranging my hair. Her own earrings, these—and your shawl. I hope you don't mind, my dear?

LISSA

Mind?—I'm delighted. You look charming.

[MISS MABIE *smiles her thanks and seats herself.*

LISSA *begins to pour the coffee.*

MISS MABIE

Now, then!—We were saying?

[ADRIAN *fills a brandy-glass for BLISS.*

LISSA

How do you take your coffee?

MISS MABIE (*smiling*)

I don't.

LISSA

You——?

MISS MABIE

It keeps me awake. (*She reaches for the brandy glass.*) Is this for me?—Thank you—(ADRIAN *smiles perfunctorily and fills the other glass.* MISS MABIE

takes a sip from hers.)—It is more than good. What is it?

ADRIAN

Brandy—rather strong, I'm afraid.

[MISS MABIE *takes a swallow.*

MISS MABIE (*beaming*)

Not at all. On the contrary.

[*She puts the glass down for a moment, picks up the jonquils and smells them.*

ADRIAN (*to BLISS*)

I'll ring for another glass——

BLISS

None for me, thanks. I don't want to spoil the champagne.

MISS MABIE

It doesn't spoil it. On the contrary.

[*BLISS smiles and shakes his head. MISS MABIE, with a jonquil in either hand, brings the flowers together as if they were kissing.*

MISS MABIE

Look: Isn't it sweet?

[*She does it again, cooing over them.*

LISSA

Pretty things. Indeed it is.

BLISS

The language of the flowers.

[*MISS MABIE tosses the flowers over her shoulder,*

laughs merrily, picks up her glass again, and settles herself.

MISS MABIE

Er—we were saying?

[A brief pause.]

BLISS

I was asking Mr. Terry where he got the idea for this—arrangement.

MISS MABIE (*quickly*)

It is modelled upon a similar garden attached to a little pension on the Riviera. (ADRIAN *stares at her.*) I hope I'm not giving away secrets?

ADRIAN

No indeed. But I wasn't aware that I—that is, it must have been an unconscious——

MISS MABIE (*to BLISS*)

In Cannes, to be exact. I recognized it instantly—didn't I, Mr. Terry?—The little statues—and the mimosa—the old walls. You see, it was in Cannes that Mr. Terry first engaged me. He was there convalescing from pneumonia and advertised for a competent American secretary, didn't you, Mr. Terry?

ADRIAN

Why yes. But—

MISS MABIE

—In a Nice paper. I was nearby in Nice, where I had come as companion to a Mrs. Potter. A horrid woman. So I applied. We began work at once, on Mr. Terry's first romantic play, "Frankincense."

ADRIAN

First, and only.

MISS MABIE

More's the pity. (*A sigh.*) It was perfect soil for the growth of a romance. We used to walk for hours in that garden, talking it out—while pale threads of the Mediterranean moon wove their way through the very warp and woof of our story.

BLISS

Woof, woof.

MISS MABIE

I beg your pardon?

BLISS

I said, "woof."

MISS MABIE

Is that amusing?—It was March then, but March there is like our May—(*Suddenly.*) Mr. Bliss—you are close to the Government: what possibility do you think there is for legislation elevating May Day to the eminence of a national holiday?

BLISS

Somehow, I can't see the present Administration exciting themselves over it.

MISS MABIE

We need it so! We really do! In its very nature, it throbs with life, warmth, gaiety. *I* think Adam and Eve were created on May Day.

ADRIAN

A pretty thought.

LISSA

Very.

ADRIAN

You're sure you won't take coffee?

[MISS MABIE *raises her brandy-glass.*

MISS MABIE

This will do very nicely.—How *good* it would be for everyone, once a year, to give himself over to the simple, eternal emotions. Such prigs, people are—such impossible prigs! (*Her voice lowers.*) You know, I believe one reason that May Day is left for the children, is the adult consciousness of the significance of the May Pole. (*She leans forward confidently.*) I presume you all know the origin of the May Pole? [BLISS *is the only one to laugh.*

LISSA (*hastily*)

Yes, yes—I believe we do.

ADRIAN

Quaint, isn't it?

BLISS (*simultaneously*)

You simply could not persuade the average Congressman to take hold of a ribbon and dance round the May Pole.

MISS MABIE

Then the more fools they. To me, symbols are symbols—and being symbols, inalienably divorced from their origins. (*She closes her eyes.*) I see village greens transformed into little Arcadys; village butchers and bakers, into Colins and Strephons; their

wives and daughters into Chloes and Phyllises. Round the May Pole—round and round—(ADRIAN quietly moves the decanter out of her reach.)—Why—it makes one positively dizzy!

[She opens her eyes, stares, and blinks several times.]

BLISS

Make them go the other way. That helps sometimes.

[MISS MABIE closes her eyes for a moment, then opens them again and beams upon him.]

MISS MABIE

Thank you.

[She wanders to the back of the room, fingering the decorations lovingly.]

LISSA (*softly to ADRIAN*)

Well? Will you admit it now?

ADRIAN

If I'd been at all interested, I might easily have foreseen the whole thing.

[LISSA rises abruptly; she has done her best. This is final.]

MISS MABIE

Lovely—lovely. A perfect setting, really perfect.

LISSA (*to ADRIAN, in a clear voice, without hesitation*)

Speaking of settings, I've an incident to tell you from life. This puts me in mind of it. I think it belongs in a play—

ADRIAN

Oh?—What is it?

LISSA

Something that happened to——

[*She stops, as FREDERIC enters from the hall.*]

FREDERIC

Mr. Compton, sir.

[*He stands aside to let COMPTON enter, then goes out.*]

COMPTON

Hello. Hello. Hello. (*To LISSA, as he goes to her and shakes her hand.*) I managed to slip away early. You don't mind my dropping in without notice this way?

LISSA

Hello, Roger—but of course not. We're delighted.

Oh—this is Mr. Bliss—Mr. Compton——

COMPTON (*deliberately*)

It seems to me we've met.

BLISS (*not remembering for the moment*)

Oh yes—yes, of course!

[COMPTON looks about him in wonder, then sharply at ADRIAN, who looks away.]

COMPTON (*to LISSA*)

I should say Adrian's outdone himself this time.

LISSA

Pretty, isn't it? (*With a gesture toward the tray.*)
Coffee? Brandy? Both?

COMPTON

Just this, if I may——

[He takes a lump of sugar, seats himself and begins nibbling it.]

LISSA

I was telling Adrian an incident that might be useful in his new play.

ADRIAN

My new play?

LISSA

Yes—the one about wives and mistresses. (*To COMPTON.*) Would you mind hearing it?

COMPTON

I should enjoy it very much.

ADRIAN

What is it, dear?

LISSA

Something that once actually happened to a boy and a girl in a moonlit garden—rather a curious thing, and with—a rather curious significance, I think. (*A pause.*) The girl, from what I gathered, was the product of an exceedingly careful system. Its whole end and purpose was to make her a social success—that's what the women in her family had always seemed best suited for. So she was taught to act the part till it became second nature. In those days the training was somewhat stricter.

COMPTON

Happy days.

LISSA

I don't think so.—Instinct, impulse, natural inclination, everything that was herself, went under. Upon it, another self was gradually—deposited. By the time she was nineteen, it was working admirably—automatically, even. In fact, for long stretches at a time, she completely forgot that the surface she'd acquired didn't go all the way through.

MISS MABIE

By then, perhaps it did.

LISSA

No—not as it turned out. This incident—(*She hesitates a moment, then continues:*)—In spite of the fact that it was May, there was still another dance to go to—a costume-party, somewhere in the country. She'd be Columbine again. Incidentally, she was always at her best, in costume. With everyone else about her acting, her own acting became more real.

MISS MABIE

Does that follow?—I should think——

LISSA

In her case, it did. (*A brief pause.*) Well, in the midst of it, a boy came up to her, a boy she knew, well, slightly—and rather liked. He said: "Let's get out of this heat." Out they went. For a while they just wandered about, glad enough to be cool. Then they happened on a kind of hidden path, and followed it to its end, where they found a little green door, let into a high stone wall. On the other side

was a tiny garden, that neither of them had any idea was there. It smelled damp, and sweet. The moon was shining. They sat for a long time, scarcely breathing. Then they began to dance—there was a stretch of clipped grass, smooth as could be, between the flower-beds. The music carried all the way from the house. They danced and they danced and they danced, long after the music had stopped. She had the queer feeling that all this was happening to someone else . . . she didn't know whom . . . Columbine, maybe.—Finally, they were just standing there, hushed and still, as if some spring inside had simply run down. Then she felt herself being kissed. In that instant, everything suddenly left her. She didn't know anything, didn't feel anything but that it was beautiful beyond belief to be alive. (*A pause.*) But when they got back to the house, things were—just the same again. After all, it was only Columbine who had been kissed. *She'd* merely been looking on.

[*A pause. COMPTON is watching BLISS, who is looking at his hands. Finally ADRIAN speaks, with difficulty managing to keep his voice steady:*

ADRIAN

Yes. Yes, very interesting.—And its—significance?

LISSA

It was the only important thing that had ever happened to her without reason, without plan. Some day, something might make her see, that it *wasn't* Columbine, nor yet that other person they'd taught her to be—but *herself*—oh, at last!—with the one thing in her life that was genuinely, truly her own.

[There is a long pause, punctuated by the sound of a cigarette being tapped down upon BLISS's case. ADRIAN goes to the table behind the screen, lights the library-lamp, then switches off the moonlight. The artificiality of the scene is once more made apparent. He turns to MISS MABIE and COMPTON.]

ADRIAN

It—how does it strike you?

COMPTON (*still watching BLISS*)

Very pretty, very pretty indeed.

MISS MABIE

But a little literary, don't you think?

COMPTON

Um. More than a little.

LISSA

As it happens, it's true.

COMPTON

That, unfortunately, doesn't matter.

MISS MABIE

As it stands, it's not life, but literature.

LISSA

"Literature"!—I tell you—

COMPTON (*to BLISS*)

In fact, I think I've already read it somewhere. Or seen it. Wasn't there a play called—?

MISS MABIE

Strange—I feel that too. (*She ponders.*) Where was it?

LISSA

You couldn't have. It's true! It happened!

MISS MABIE

Are you sure of your source?

LISSA

Entirely!

COMPTON

Then it must be one of those things that can't help seeming to be out of a book or off a stage.

LISSA

Everything else in her life—but not that!

MISS MABIE

It appears we differ. Now to me it seems too pat, too considered.

COMPTON

Yes. There's a sort of a deliberation about it.

[BLISS goes to the other side of the room and stands looking at them.]

MISS MABIE

A kind of self-consciousness.

COMPTON

The psychology shows through.

MISS MABIE

And the application is so obvious.

BLISS

Here are the lungs. This is the spleen. A bundle of nerves here. Perhaps we can make them twitch. (*All*

look at him.) Tableau: "A Lesson in Anatomy."
(*He returns to his place and seats himself again.*)
If it isn't a corpse you've got, you can make it one,
can't you? Go ahead——

LISSA

No, no—it's too horrible.

ADRIAN

My dear——

[*She turns from him.*]

COMPTON (*to BLISS*)

To be a corpse, a thing must have lived. This never
did.

MISS MABIE

But the characters might *bring* it to life! (*To*
ADRIAN, *excitedly*;) Just the thing! Perfect! Exactly
what you and Mr. Compton want! (*To LISSA.*) Oh
yes—yes, it *is* good.—Romance first coming to
flower——

LISSA

Reality!

MISS MABIE (*indulgently*)

For Mr. Terry's purposes, my dear—(*To ADRIAN.*)
—And you see?—Just the right taint of literature.
We've all felt it. (*To LISSA.*) Later on she married
another man?

LISSA

Yes.

MISS MABIE

And you wanted to show what it was, that might

have caused this particular wife to become another man's mistress, at heart?

LISSA

Perhaps not merely at heart.

[*There is a pause.*]

MISS MABIE

Yes.—Well, Mr. Terry's plan requires that there be something false in the very beginnings of this disturbing memory.

ADRIAN

Miss Mabie!

LISSA (*simultaneously*)

But how interesting! Do let her tell us.

[*She turns to* MISS MABIE.]

MISS MABIE

For a number of years everything went smoothly. They were happy. Then one day her—(*She loads the word with scorn.*)—her "cavalier" returned. They met. He saw that she was even more desirable than before.—And he claimed her.

[COMPTON *is watching* BLISS *like a hawk.*]

LISSA

And did she acknowledge the claim?

MISS MABIE

Did she, Mr. Terry?

ADRIAN

I don't know. Lissa—won't another time do as well?

LISSA

I'm afraid not.

[*Again she turns inquiringly to MISS MABIE.*]

MISS MABIE

The point is that something she wasn't aware of had occurred in the meantime.

BLISS

Now we're getting it!

MISS MABIE (*to BLISS*)

Her husband has learned of the existence of this memory, which she cherishes as—(*To LISSA.*)—How did you put it?—"As the one real thing in her life—the one thing ever, that had happened without plan"—?

LISSA (*nodding briefly*)

That will do.

MISS MABIE

He learns that of all things *it* was perhaps the most deliberately planned.

BLISS

Hah! (*Suddenly, with a bitter laugh, he throws back his head and thrusts his arms up toward the ceiling. As suddenly, he is facing MISS MABIE again, smiling ironically.*) This is marvellous.

[*LISSA glances at him, but he will not look at her.*]

MISS MABIE

The other man was following to the letter a chapter in a novel which aimed to demonstrate—(*To COMP-*

TON.)—*falsely* to demonstrate—(To BLISS.)—that every wife is another man's mistress—and why.

BLISS

“A novel”— But that's not quite right, is it?

COMPTON

It will serve, don't you think?

BLISS

No!

[LISSA's alarm grows. She looks from one to another, and finally back to BLISS.

LISSA

Why not?

BLISS (*his eyes fixed on MISS MABIE*)

Wait a minute. (To MISS MABIE.)—And what did this seventh son of a husband do then?

MISS MABIE

Well—er—(*She glances nervously at ADRIAN, who sits with his head bent, knotting his watch-chain.*)

Well—er—he realized the man's unworthiness——

BLISS

Tsch!—In what? Taste?

[COMPTON *stirs uneasily, his anger growing.* MISS MABIE's voice rises.

MISS MABIE

Certainly in *taste*! (*A pause. BLISS gestures for her to proceed. After a moment she does so, more calmly.*) And he knew that her remembrance of the

affair was the one mar on an otherwise perfect relationship: his wife loved him dearly; the other was a—kind of sickness.

BLISS

—So desperate remedies, before it proved fatal, eh?

MISS MABIE

For her sake, as well as his own, he determined to blot the memory out. The question was “how?”—And the answer: “Romantic incidents don’t bear repeating.”

LISSA

Indeed.

ADRIAN (*agonized*)

Lissa!

LISSA

Please!—You wouldn’t have me lose the thread?

[ADRIAN *sinks back and sits with his chin resting upon his hand, his eyes closed.*]

MISS MABIE (*to LISSA*)

He knew these two people well: his wife—as his wife; the man, from that one act, as——

COMPTON (*to BLISS*)

—As the lying bounder he was.

[BLISS *takes a deep breath and holds it.*]

MISS MABIE (*nodding*)

So by placing the two alone once more in the same, or a similar situation, he thought he could foresee the means whereby——

BLISS (*rising*)

Of course.

[ADRIAN *risés also. The two men confront each other.*

MISS MABIE

—Whereby his wife would be——

LISSA

—Cured of her sickness. Most ingenious, most.

[ADRIAN *moves toward the hall.*

MISS MABIE

He discovered, however, that he loved her too much to submit her to such a scheme.

[ADRIAN *is about to go out.*

LISSA

Adrian! (*He turns.*) I wish you would wait, please. (*He waits near the door, his back to them, LISSA turns to MISS MABIE.*)—Or perhaps he lost faith in his foresight—faith, maybe, in his ability to make tight little rules about people.

MISS MABIE

I think it was love.

LISSA

Even so, all the arrangements had been made, hadn't they? The stage was set. His situation was there, begging to be taken advantage of, begging to be played. (ADRIAN *moves quickly toward the door. She rises.*) Adrian! (*He halts.*) I ask you to wait. (*He does so.*) So now what?

MISS MABIE

We don't know. You see, that brings us to an *impasse*. We've got no ending.

LISSA

It may end itself.

MISS MABIE (*eagerly*)

You think so? The right way?

COMPTON

It's bound to. There'll be something else to show him up just as well.

LISSA

Him?—Which him?

BLISS

The "bounder," of course. (*To COMPTON.*) But do you think you've got enough of him?

COMPTON

How d'you mean?

BLISS

That one act of his.

COMPTON

It's enough. It's a complete characterization in itself.

BLISS

Oh?—Then, after a glance at you, one may say: "He's gone dry. He's got the soul of a snuff-box." (*COMPTON brings himself to his feet.*) Or, after a ten-minute talk with Terry: "His brain alone lives. His heart and body drag from it, dead. The man's a clock."

COMPTON

Look here!

MISS MABIE

Really, Mr. Bliss——

BLISS (*to MISS MABIE*)

Or that, after a glass or two of wine, *you* talk incessantly: "The woman's a sot."

ADRIAN

Actually, this is——

BLISS

—In unspeakable taste! Yes, I mean it to be. Now with taste out of the way, perhaps we can talk like living beings, instead of the polite concoctions manufactured by you and Compton for your adoring publics.

COMPTON

Bliss——!

BLISS

Compton, if you had accredited instances of my having committed every sin on the calendar, you wouldn't have *me*. Is that understood? (COMPTON *is unable to answer*. BLISS *turns to LISSA*.) Lissa, you may have gathered from all this literary plot-hatching, that what happened to us that night wasn't quite as spontaneous as you thought it. (LISSA *gestures helplessly*.) True—it wasn't. The idea for it, however, came, not from a novel, but from a novelist. (*He indicates COMPTON, scornfully*.) This one. He was there the afternoon of the party, wagging his wise tongue to Kendall and me on the susceptibility of the feminine heart, be it ever so protected. The garden in moonlight would do it, he said: Also, he

coined that pretty slogan: "Every wife another man's mistress."—I was twenty-two, and not hard to impress. In addition, I was desperately lonely at the prospect of a long exile, to begin the next day. I wanted to be loved: I never had been, nor had I ever. I set out deliberately to follow his formula.

LISSA

You—(*She turns away.*)—This isn't necessary. Comedy, this is comedy.

BLISS

If you don't mind too much, I'd rather. (*A pause. MISS MABIE goes out into the study, COMPTON into the hall. BLISS continues:*) You know what happened. I needn't tell you that whatever plan I had went sky-high in an instant. Afterwards, when I'd think that I ever *had* a plan, I'd feel—I'd feel sick. I got the news of your wedding, and it was awful. I told myself "serves you right"—and tried to get over you. But it was no go. Before long, I realized that it never would be. But I worked over myself, and when I felt I was well enough in hand, I came back.

ADRIAN

Yes.—Yes, you did—didn't you?

BLISS

I wanted to know one thing: whether or not Lissa was happy. The only way to find out, was to be here with you both. If she *was*—all right. If she wasn't—(*LISSA goes away from them. ADRIAN follows her with his eyes, his suffering plainly apparent.*) I didn't know until tonight, when this clever setting of yours

suddenly cut through all the pretty appearances. I doubt if *she* knew, until then. So, whatever you get, you've yourself to thank for it.

[*An exclamation is wrung from* ADRIAN.]

LISSA

Norrie!

ADRIAN

No, dear—I shall want you to be just as honest.

[LISSA *glances about her, at the room.*]

LISSA (*half to herself*)

But—then it *wasn't* a sign this afternoon. That night in the garden—it didn't—just *happen*. No. Plans—always plans.

BLISS (*suddenly*)

Lissa, I love you. Will you come with me?

LISSA (*after a moment*)

By every—by all the—cold reasoning I can do—I'd—I would. I believe in you, utterly. But—just for now, I—don't *feel* anything——

BLISS

Perhaps—later on——

LISSA

I don't know.

BLISS (*with difficulty*)

Whenever—. If ever——

LISSA

Yes. Yes. . . . Good-bye—— (*She takes his hand in hers.*) My sweet Norrie, good-bye.

[She raises his hand to her lips and kisses it. For a long instant he looks at her, unable to reply. Then he turns sharply, and goes out into the hall. After a moment, LISSA turns to ADRIAN. He finds something in her eyes that makes him cry out:]

ADRIAN

No! No!

LISSA

Good-bye, Adrian.

ADRIAN

Lissa!

LISSA

Good-bye, my dear.

ADRIAN

Our life together—it was so perfect I couldn't bear for even a breath to touch it. It was—because I loved you—*all* of it! You must know that!

LISSA

I know I have reason, and a free will. I know I live and breathe. Yet—people close to me—keep pulling me this way, that way, every which way. I—don't think I want to be close to anyone, for awhile.

ADRIAN

Lissa—Lissa——

LISSA

You—your first instinct was to put me through my paces, as if I were a creature of your mind, without will, without hope, but to go through the motions of a life you'd created for me.

ADRIAN

Of course I see what you mean. But——

LISSA (*in sudden fury*)

Do you? And do you see it's not *good* to do that with me? (*She shuts her eyes and huddles herself in her arms.*) I do—I do!—Oh, shame on you, Adrian, shame!—I'm a woman you say you love—I'm not to be done that with—you can't *do* that with people, Adrian. That's God's province. For you, it's—it's blasphemy.

ADRIAN

If only you could understand how—how I merely wanted—how I wanted only——
[*He cannot go on.*]

LISSA

Never mind. I'll—be going, now. I'd rather you wouldn't—see me off. I don't know where I shall be—but somewhere—a *person*—living—(*She takes a long, deep breath.*) Actually!

ADRIAN

Something will bring you back to me. (*She shakes her head.* ADRIAN *cries out in despair.*)—How I wanted only to spare you!

LISSA

You'd no right to spare me.—And there *was* no problem, was there?—Not till you'd made it one. Even then it was my problem, wasn't it? (*With emphasis.*) *My* problem.—But without so much as a by-your-leave, you made my problem your own. And then—then the great thing was to handle it with

style, taste, distinction. (*She gazes about her at the setting.*) Look at this—the detail of it! This clever, clever, weak, weak thing. (*Her voice changes.*) When you'd merely to take my shoulders in your hands and say: "Look here, you Lissa—I'm scared.—You love me *wholly!* Understand?" But—(*Again she glances at the setting.*)—style—taste—and the rest doesn't matter—the rest will come. Oh, *taste*—above all things!

ADRIAN

I—can't plead with you.

[*A brief pause. She looks at him intently.*]

LISSA

I wonder what would happen if, even now, you should take me in your arms—and *keep* me from going. . . .

[*He averts his head, wretchedly.*]

ADRIAN

You know I couldn't do that.

LISSA

No—it isn't in character, is it? (*A pause.*) Not quite—in good taste.—I leave you your taste, Adrian. (*He winces, as if she had struck him.*) Oh, I must make you see. You *must* see! (*A moment. Then she leans up and kisses him, gently.*) Good-bye, my dear. Thanks for many things.

[*She turns, and is gone. ADRIAN stands rigid, staring after her. Then he calls:*

ADRIAN

Lissa!

[*There is no response. A moment, then MISS MABIE*

pauses in the hall-doorway, on her way from the study to the stairs. She has discarded the shawl and wears her hat and coat.

MISS MABIE

Mr. Terry—(*He turns to her.*)—If I hadn't, she'd have gone with him.

ADRIAN

She's going——

MISS MABIE

—But alone. (*He gestures, helplessly.*) And there's the chance she may love you. If she does, she can't help but come back. (*Her voice rises.*) Oh, surely—after all these happy years—surely you, of all people, know *her* well enough to——

[*ADRIAN lifts his head. His words come as a despairing cry:*

ADRIAN

I know no one!

[*He sinks down upon the bench, hopeless, forsaken. For a moment she regards him compassionately, then speaks softly:*

MISS MABIE

That's very encouraging. Remember that, won't you?
[*She goes out. He is alone, staring miserably at the grass-carpet, digging at it with his heel.*

CURTAIN

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